University Reader

大学生读书计划



叶紫小说选



Selected Stories by Ye Zi

English-Chinese · Gems of Chinese Literature · *Modern*

英汉对照 · 中国文学宝库 · 现代文学系列

叶紫 著

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中国文学出版社
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大学生读书计划

——中国文学宝库出版呼吁

在即将开机印刷这第一批50本名为中国文学宝库的英汉对照读本时，我们的心情竟然忧多于喜。因为我们只能以保守的5000册印数，去面对全国400万在校大学生。

虽然我们并非市场经济的局外者，若仅为印数（销售量）计，大可奋起而去生产诸如TOFEL应试指南，或者英语四六级模拟试题集一类的教辅图书，但我们还是决定宁可冒着债台高筑的风险，也有责任对大学生同胞发出一声亲切的呼唤：请亲近我们的中国文学。

身为向世界译介中国文学和向国内出版外语读物的，具有双重责任的出版社，我们得知目前大学生往往仅注重外语的学习而偏废了母语的提高，以及忽视了中国文学的阅读，放弃了人文知识的训练。有统计表明，某理工院校57%的同学不曾读过《红楼梦》等四大名著，以致校园内外流行着“样子像研究生，说话像大学生，作文像中学生，写字像小学生”的幽默。还有一副这样的对联，说大学生的文章是“无错不成文，病句错句破残句，句句不堪入目；有误方为篇，别字错字自造字，字字触目惊心”，横批“斯文扫地”。作为未来社会中坚和整个社会发展关键力量的大学生，这种“文弃”现象的流行，势必导致一场人文精神危机的爆发。对照以科学与人文精神追求为主题的五四新文化运动，八十年的历程告诉我们，以上提醒绝非危言耸听。

我们已经迈入知识经济时代，在追求科学知识的同时，创新精神已成为关键；而创新的源泉其实有赖于多学科多领域知识的交融，依靠的是新型的复合型人才，所以，文学对于新一代

的大学生来说绝非装点，而是沟通自然科学与人文科学的桥梁，使我们在汲取知识的同时更能获得智慧，于创造物质的同时还进一步丰富和完善着精神；无怪乎爱因斯坦认为自己受影响最大的竟是陀思妥耶夫斯基。由此证明，一个真正的科学家应该拥有丰富的文学和文化知识以及完整的人格。十年前，七十五位诺贝尔奖得主聚会巴黎，当时他们所发表的宣言开篇就是，“如果人类要在21世纪生存下去，必须回首2500年去吸收孔子的智慧。”确实，十年的时间让我们有目共睹，现代经济科技的飞速发展何尝不是一柄双刃的剑？只有文化的力量才能抵消随之而来的负面后果。可见，知识的获取与技能的训练对于大学生来说固然重要，但文化与修养却尤需关切。正因为大学生代表着社会先知先觉的知识力量，置身当前的文化现实，就应有一分责任感与使命感，力求对知识技能以外许多带有根本性质的精神追求形成明确的意识，从而具备一种对生命意义进行探索与追问的精神，一种以人文精神为背景的生存勇气和人格力量。那么，能够引导我们探索前行的一盏明灯，不就是闪烁着理想光芒的不朽的文学名著吗？

一个人乃至一个民族，从其对文学的亲疏态度，可以衡量出其文化素质的程度。文学应是从人类文化中升华出的理想的结晶，她“使人的心灵变得高尚，使人的勇气、荣誉感、希望、尊严、同情心、怜悯心和牺牲精神复活起来”（威廉·福克纳）；无疑，只有文学才能从更高的层次上提升人的文化素质和整体素质，充实人的内心世界，焕发人的精神风貌，带给人们真善美。而亲近文学，特别是热爱祖国灿烂的文学以及文化，正是当代中国大学生加强文化修养，弘扬人文精神的有力脚步。

“越是民族的，就越是世界的”，中国文学属于中国，也属于世界。和平是人类的共同愿望，交流与共享则是新世纪的潮流。

中国当代大学生的血液里流动着数千年的文化积淀，没有理由在让世界了解中国大学生聪明才智的同时，却无缘分享我们的骄傲——中国大学生不但能够读懂英语的莎士比亚，而且能让世界感动于中国文学的伟大。

这是我们作为出版者的理想。我们原有一个世纪礼物的构想，是同大学生一起做一个“读书计划”。这一次将中国文学的最新荟萃配设高水平的英语译文，是其中推荐给新世纪大学生的第一批读物。盼望着您——我们无数知音中的5000名先来者，给我们鼓励，也给我们意见和批评。

编者

一九九九年五月三十日

只有文学才能从更高的层次上提升人的文化素质和整体素质，充实人的内心世界，焕发人的精神风貌，带给人们真善美。而亲近文学，特别是热爱祖国灿烂的文学以及文化，正是当代中国大学生加强文化修养，弘扬人文精神的有力脚步。

Harvest

I

It was nearly Qing Ming Festival. The rain had been coming down for days, and the sky remained overcast without the slightest sign of clearing up.

Uncle Yunpu, still in the shabby padded gown that had seen him through the winter, sat near the entrance of the Cao Ancestral Temple. He was shaking with a slight tremor, as if his body found it hard to withstand the chill that was penetrating to his bones. Looking up to survey the sky, he muttered incoherently under his breath and looked down again.

"Oh, Heaven! Is it going to be like last year?" he whispered.

Then turning towards his wife who was sitting at the foot of the stage in front of the temple, he said hesitatingly: "Ma, they say after the first thunder shower in spring you should be able to take off your padded clothes. Now it's nearly Qing Ming and it's still too cold to go without them. Could it be that this year will be like last?"

She made no reply. She was busy nursing little Sixi at her breast.

The weather was really dreadful enough to worry anyone to

丰　收

一

时间是快要到清明节了。天，下着雨，阴沉沉的没有一点晴和的征兆。

云普叔坐在"曹氏家祠"的大门口，还穿着过冬天的那件破旧棉袍；身子微微颤动，像是耐不住这袭人的寒气。他抬头望了一望天，嘴边不知道念了几句什么话，又低了下去。胡须上倒悬着一线一线的涎沫，迎风飘动，刚刚用手抹去，随即又流出了几线来。

"难道再要和去年一样吗？我的天哪！"

他低声地说了这么一句，便回头反望着坐在戏台下的妻子，很迟疑地说着：

"秋儿的娘呀！'惊蛰一过，棉裤脱落！'现在快清明了，还脱不下袍儿。这，莫非是又要和去年一样吗？"

云普婶没有回答，在忙着给怀中的四喜儿喂奶。

天气也真太使人着急了，立春后一连下了

death. The rain had been pattering for more than a month, ever since the lunar calendar marked the beginning of spring. People felt terribly afraid. In the past, it had always been like this: a bitter cold spell around the beginning of spring meant that it would certainly be a flood year again.

"Heaven above, if it's going to be the same..." Uncle Yunpu once more gazed up at the sky, while with one hand he kept tapping his pipe on the stone steps.

"It couldn't be!" said Mrs. Yunpu after a pause, in a rather offhand manner, her face still turned towards the child in her arms.

"Why couldn't it be? Didn't we have a cold spell like this at the beginning of spring in 1924 and 1926? Besides, this year Heaven is going to make people really suffer."

Uncle Yunpu was irritated by his wife's casual answer. He felt as if this year's fate was already sealed. Had not the oracle in the Guan Di [1] Temple stated clearly that it was going to be a bad year and that death would take a toll of 60 to 70 per cent of the population?

Memories of past suffering, deeply engraved in the mind of Uncle Yunpu, inspired these fears. He remembered the year 1924 when he had just managed to scrape together one meal a day composed of yams and weeds which he had gathered here and there. The year after was slightly better, but the following year they were

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① Guan Di, or Emperor Guan, was regarded by the peasants in some parts of China as the ruler in Heaven. Originally called Guan Yu, he was a famous general during the period of the Three Kingdoms in the third century.

三十多天雨没有停住过，人们都感受着深沉的恐怖。往常都是这样：春分奇冷，一定又是一个大水年岁。

“天啦！要又是一样，……”

云普叔又掉头望着天，将手中的一根旱烟管，不住地在石阶级上磕动。

“该不会吧！”

云普婶歇了半天功夫，随便地说着，脸还是朝着怀中的孩子。

“怎么不会呢？春分过了，还有这样的寒冷！庚午年，甲子年，丙寅年的春天，不都是有这样冷吗？况且，今年的天老爷是要大收人的！”

云普叔反对妻子的那种随便的答复，好像今年的命运，已经早在这儿卜定了一般。关帝爷爷的灵签上曾明白地说过了：今年的人，一定是要死去六七成的！

烙印在云普叔脑筋中的许多痛苦的印象，凑成了那些恐怖的因子。他记得：甲子年他吃过野菜抖山芋，一天只能捞到一顿。乙丑年刚刚好一点，丙寅年又喊吃树根。庚午辛未年他

again reduced to tree bark and roots. As for previous famine years, they had occurred when he was still very young, so the suffering did not seem quite so bad. But last year — Heavens! It was something Uncle Yunpu dared not even think about.

The year before, there had been eight mouths to feed in his household; this year there were only six left. Besides Yunpu and his wife, there was their eldest son, twenty-year-old Liqiu, who was his father's right-hand man. The second son, Shaopu, was fourteen. He too had started to help with work in the fields. Yingying, the ten-year-old daughter, helped her mother make rain hats, and the youngest was Sixi, the baby, who was still being breast-fed. Yunpu's father and the six-year-old child, Tiger, had died the September before from eating Mercy Powder. [1]

What a jolly family he had, and not a single member who ate without working for it! Who would say Uncle Yunpu wasn't destined to become rich? Yes, Uncle Yunpu was meant to spend a comfortable and prosperous old age. It was only tough luck that had brought a succession of wars, droughts and floods, year after year, crushing him so that he could hardly raise his head.

The year before, that dreadful year before, had been worse than a nightmare. Because of wars and natural calamities, he had been compelled, in desperation, to rent seven *mu* of Mr. He's land in the hope that his fortune might take a turn for the better. After all,

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[1] Fine white clay, believed to be edible and sent by Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy.

还年少，好像并不十分痛苦。只有去年，我的天呀！云普叔简直是不能作想啊！

去年，云普叔一家有八口人吃茶饭，今年就只剩了六个：除了云普婶外，大儿子立秋二十岁，这是云普叔的左右手！二儿子少普十四岁，也已经开始在田里和云普叔帮忙。女儿英英十岁，她能跟着妈妈打斗笠。最小的一个便是四喜儿，还在吃奶。云普爷爷和一个六岁的虎儿，是去年八月吃观音粉① 吃死的。

这样一个热闹的家庭中，吃呆饭的人一个也没有，谁不说云普叔会发财呢？是的，云普叔原是应该发财的人，就因为运气太不好了，连年的兵灾水旱，才把他压得抬不起头来。不然，他也不会那么示弱于人哩！

去年，这可怕的去年啦！云普叔自己也如同过着梦境一样。为了连年的兵灾水旱，他不得不拚命地加种了何八爷七亩田，希图有个转

① 观音粉：一种白色的细泥土。——原注。

there were many hands in his family; each extra *mu* of land cultivated would mean just so much more at harvest time. He had hoped that after deducting the rent to be paid to He there would be some grain left for themselves. If they could have managed to get enough to eat for a year or so, there is no question but that they would have become prosperous, Yunpu had made up his mind to sell his entire property, which consisted of the little hut they lived in, and become a tenant of Mr. He's.

He had moved his whole family into the ancestral temple in March and had become caretaker of the ancestral tablets, for which duty he was given a string of money at the oblation in spring and autumn. Mr. He had taken over his hut and had allowed him to cultivate his seven *mu* of land at the customary rate of 70 per cent of the harvest. Had Yunpu actually been able to keep the 30 per cent of the harvest in his own hands, he would have considered himself quite lucky.

At first, Yunpu had really felt extremely happy. He and his sons had laboured unstintingly, and he felt doubly reassured by the fact that the crops were growing well and the rain was just right. If he was careful in his cultivation and they managed a good harvest, everything would be all right, he had thought.

Pretty soon the seedlings took root and started to bud. Quickly, ears of grain appeared; with a few more days of mild south wind he could count on the appearance of a golden field of rice. Yunpu had been filled with joy. Was this not ample reward for his unceasing hard labour?

He had felt like jumping up and down for joy. But it happened

运。自己家里有人手，多种一亩田，就多一亩田的好处；除纳去何八爷的租谷以外，多少总还有几粒好捞的。能吃一两年饱饭，还怕弄不发财吗？主意打定后，云普叔就卖掉了自己仅有的一所屋子，来租何八爷的田种。

二月里，云普叔全家搬进到这祠堂里来了，替祖宗打扫灵牌，春秋二祭还有一串钱的赏格。自家的屋子，也是由何八爷承受的。七亩田的租谷仍照旧规，三七开，云普叔能有三成好到手，便算很不错的。

起先，真使云普叔欢喜。虽然和儿子费了很多力气，然而禾苗很好，雨水也极调和，只要照拂得法，收获下来，便什么都不成问题了。

看看地，禾苗都发了根，涨了苞，很快地便标线① 了，再刮二三日老南风，就可以看到黄金色的谷子摆在眼前。云普叔真是喜欢啊！这不是他日夜辛劳的代价吗？

他几乎欢喜得发跳起来，就在他将要发跳

① 标线：即稻的穗子从禾苞中长出来。——原注。

that the day after, Heaven had changed his mind. Huge drops of rain started falling in the southwest, and soon the shower spread to the village. In barely half a day, the water in the ponds had begun to rise. Uncle Yunpu was suddenly seized with a sense of uneasiness; he was afraid that the precious rice flowers in the fields would be destroyed by the heavy rain, and his harvest ruined. By afternoon the rain had stopped. Yunpu felt as light-hearted as if a heavy burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

In the middle of the night, however, the sky had suddenly turned so dark that it was impossible to see even two feet ahead. The clanging of gongs sounded from all sides; racing feet and shouting voices clamoured against the whirling of the wind. Uncle Yunpu knew that some accident had taken place. In great haste, he woke his eldest son, and in the dark they raced towards the sound of the gongs.

They met a neighbour on the way and learnt that both the west stream and the south stream had risen thirty feet. Caojialong was threatened by breaks here and there in the dykes surrounding the village. The gongs were sounded to call the people together to reinforce the dykes.

Uncle Yunpu was stunned. For the water to rise suddenly 10 yards in the night was a rare phenomenon which had not occurred in forty or fifty years. He was in a panic. The faster the gongs beat, the more unsteady his steps became. The night was dark and the path slippery. He fell time and again, and picked himself up with great difficulty. Finally his son took hold of his arm and they ran on together. But they had gone only a few paces when they

的第二天哩，天老爷忽然翻了脸。蛋大的雨点由西南方直向这垄上扑来，只有半天功夫，池塘里的水都起膨涨。云普叔立刻就感受着有些不安似的，恐怕这好好的稻花，都要被雨点打落，而影响到收成的不丰。午后，雨渐渐地停住了，云普叔的心中，像放落一副千斤担子般的轻快。

半晚上，天上忽然黑得伸手看不见自家的拳头，四面的锣声，像雷一般地轰着，人声一片一片地喧嚷奔驰，风刮得呼呼地叫吼，云普叔知道又是外面发生了什么意外的事变，急急忙忙地叫起了立秋儿，由黑暗中向着锣声的响处飞跑。

路上，云普叔碰到了小二疤子，知道西水和南水一齐暴涨了三丈多，曹家垄四围的堤口，都危险得厉害，锣声是喊动大家去挡堤的。

云普叔吃了一惊，黑夜里陡涨几丈水，是四五十年来少见的怪事。他慌了张，锣声越响越厉害，他的脚步也越加乱了。天黑路滑，跌倒了又爬起来。最后是立秋扶住他跑的，还不到三

heard a loud crash, as if heaven itself had burst open. Uncle Yunpu's legs shook like leaves in the wind. Immediately, waves of turbulent water rushed towards them. Liqiu quickly lifted his father on his back, turned around and raced home. Just as they entered their door, the water reached the stone steps.

The water had broken through a corner of the dyke at Xindukou, forming an opening about 300 feet wide. Caojialong's fields of gold had all dissolved in the water.

Yunpu was half crazed. His proceeds from half a year's hard work and the subsistence of his whole family were in that one instant washed away by the water. All day, he went about moaning, "Heavens, oh my Heavens! My grains of gold have turned into water!"

And so now once again Uncle Yunpu saw fateful signs of disaster appear. He could not help but feel desperately worried. From June the year before up until that very moment, he had not had one adequate meal of rice. The water had receded in July, and the famine-stricken peasants of the village had gone out together to beg for food. But when they had reached Ningxiang, they had been taken for political hoodlums and driven away. After this incident no one had been allowed to go far from his front door. It was said that the county government had received 30,000 dollars for famine relief; but actually not a single grain of rice ever reached the peasants in the countryside. Mr. He bought seventy piculs of soya beans from the provincial capital for the relief of the famine in the village. Uncle Yunpu managed to borrow fifty catties at the price of 6.30 dollars to which was added an interest rate of 4.5 per cent per month.

步,就听到一声天崩地裂的震响,云普叔的脚像弹棉花絮一般战动起来。很快地,如万马奔驰般的浪涛向他们扑来了。立秋急急地背起云普叔返身就逃。刚才回到自己的头门口,水已经流到了阶下。

新渡口的堤溃开了三十几丈宽一个角,曹家垄满垸子的黄金都化成了水。

于是云普叔发了疯。半年辛辛苦苦的希望,一家生命的泉源,都在这一刹那间被水冲毁得干干净净了。他终天地狂呼着:

"天哪!我粒粒的黄金都化成了水!"

现在,云普叔又见到了这样希奇的征兆,他怎么不心急呢?去年五月到现在,他还没有吃饱过一顿干饭。六月初水就退了,垄上的饥民想联合出门去讨米,刚刚走到宁乡就被认作了乱党赶出境来,以后就半步大门都不许出。县城里据说领了三万洋钱的赈款,乡下没有看见发下一颗米花儿。何八爷从省里贩了七十担大豆子回垄济急,云普叔只借到五斗,价钱是六块

But there were eight in Yunpu's house, and eventually even the grass was all eaten and they simply could not carry on any longer. Yunpu went down on his knees to Mr. He and obtained on loan another thirty catties of beans. In September, Mercy Powder was discovered at Huajia Dyke and the villagers all went down in crowds to dig it up for food. Uncle Yunpu and Liqiu managed to get about three piculs. The family fed on that for a day or so, and as a result, the grandfather departed this world taking with him the six-year-old child, Tiger.

When finally the famine-stricken villagers were all on the very brink of starvation, Mr. He had talked to the county magistrate and guaranteed on their behalf that they would not become political hoodlums. After innumerable entreaties, a few exit permits had been issued, and thus the peasants had been able to leave their village homes. Uncle Yunpu and his family had been sent to a busy town where they had spent four months as starving refugees. They had not returned until the end of the year. All this had happened the year before.

At that time, the villagers were making rain hats of bamboo as a temporary measure to keep alive. In the rainy season if a person made ten rain hats a day he could have two meals of thin gruel. Uncle Yunpu and Liqiu split the bamboo and Mrs. Yunpu, with Shaopu and Yingying, worked day and night weaving the hats. Work, work, work, must do all they can with the weaving. What else was there for them but weaving? If only they could keep alive until the autumn harvest!

三,月息四分五。一家有八口人,后来连青草都吃光了,实在不能再挨下去,才跪在何八爷面前加借了三斗豆子。八月里华家堤掘出了观音粉,垄上的人都争先恐后地跑去挖来吃,云普叔带着立秋挖了两三担回来,吃不到两天,云普爷爷升天了,临走还带去了一个六岁的虎儿。

后来,垄上的饥民都走到死亡线上了,才由何八爷代替饥民向县太爷担保不会变乱党,再三地求了几张护照,分途逃出境来。云普叔一家被送到一个热闹的城里,过了四个月的饥民生活,年底才回家来。这都是去年啦!苦,又有谁能知道呢?

这时候,垄上的人都靠着临时编些斗笠过活。下雨,一天每人能编十只斗笠,就可以捞到两顿稀饭钱。云普叔和立秋剖篾;少普、云普婶和英英日夜不停地赶着编。编呀,尽量地编呀!不编有什么办法呢?只要是有命挨到秋收。

For over a month now, the spring rain had been pouring down. It was bitterly cold. Everyone in the village was seized with the same fear.

"Merciful Heavens, is it going to be like last year again?"

II

The sky eventually cleared up; people crept out of the gloomy houses in which they had been hiding for over a month, and looked about. Happy smiles hovered on pale, sallow faces; children ran around in groups under the sun, their bare legs sporting over the soft muddy ground.

Everywhere the water level was high — in the ponds, the fields and the lakes. Young grass was springing up all over the place and sparkling rain drops hung from the rushes like little particles of silvery pearls. The willows too had begun to sprout. Spring sunshine appearing after a long period of rain lent an atmosphere of vitality and freshness to everything in the village.

People promptly started to chatter among themselves and bustle with activity. On the foot-paths near the fields, bare-footed people walked about, loitering here and there, now pointing at the ponds, now examining the ditches and talking of this and that. All of them were making plans and preparations for the work of the coming season.

There was a sudden drop in the market for rain hats since the weather had cleared up in that vicinity. The men could no longer stay at home all day to cut the strips, and as a result work slack-

春雨一连下了三十多天了，天气又寒冷得这么厉害，满垄上的人，都怀着一种同样恐怖的心境。

“天啦！今年难道又要和去年一样吗？……”

二

天毕竟是晴和了，人们从蛰伏了三十多天的阴郁底屋子里爬出来。菜青色的脸膛，都挂上了欣欢的微笑。孩子们一伴一伴地跑来跑去，赤着脚在太阳底下踏着软泥儿耍着。

水全是那样满满的，无论池塘里、田中或是湖上。遍地都长满了嫩草，没有晒干的雨点挂在草叶上，像一颗一颗的小银珠。杨柳发芽了，在久雨初晴的春色中，这垄上，是一切都有了欣欣开展的气象。

人们立时开始喧嚷着，活跃着。展眼望去，田畦上时常有赤脚来往的人群，徘徊观望；三个五个一伙的，指指池塘又查查决口，谈这谈那，都准备着，计划着，应该如何动手做他们在这个时节里的功夫。

斗笠的销路突然地阻塞了，为了到处都天晴。男子们白天不能在家里剖篾，妇人和孩子

ened for the women and children. The tight screws of life were immediately felt within the whole village.

Uncle Yunpu, who had prayed day in and day out for the rain to stop, now had his wish fulfilled. But a smile only flickered fleetingly over his face; it disappeared immediately to be followed by tightly knitted brows. It was still too cold to dispense with his padded gown. The sun only produced a faint tingle of warmth on Uncle Yunpu's body, but he did not bother about that. He was only worried as to how he could get over the present crisis — how to get a few good meals of rice so as to have strength enough to go to work in the fields.

The drop in the market for rain hats meant cutting out their daily meals of thin gruel. Uncle Yunpu was therefore more worried than ever. He was convinced that it was his fate to suffer: he had not known an hour of comfort since the day he was born. By the time he was fifty, he had undergone any number of hardships, but he had yet to see one happy day. The fortune-tellers said that his old age would be spent in comfort, but that was something which would come about after he had turned fifty-five. It was hard for him to believe in something so far in the future. Neither of his sons was at all worldly-wise, and he found it most difficult to maintain a household for six during those years of hard luck.

"I must find a way out somehow!"

Uncle Yunpu had never completely given up hope. Whenever a tough problem confronted him he would repeat this sentence over and over again in his mind, and sometimes he would be able to think of a good solution. This time, he knew that the crisis was an

的工作,也无形中松散下来,生活的紧箍咒,随即把这整个的农村牢牢地套住。努力地下田去工作吧,工作时原不能不吃饭呀!

镇日祈祷着天晴的云普叔,他的目的总算是达到了。然而微笑是很吝啬地只在他的脸上轻轻地拂了一下,便随着紧蹙的眉消逝了。棉袍还是不能脱下,太阳晒在他的身上,只有那么一点儿辣辣的难熬,他没有放在心上。他只是担心着,怎样地才能够渡过这紧急的难关——饱饱地捞两餐白米饭吃了,补一补精神,好到田中去。

斗笠的销路没有了,眼前的稀饭就起了巨大的恐慌,于是云普叔更加焦急。他知道他的命苦,生下来就没有过过一时舒服的生涯。今年五十岁了,苦头总算吃过不少,好的日子却还没有看见过。算八字的先生都说:他的老晚景很好;然而那是五十五岁以后的事情,他总不能十分相信。两个儿子又都不懂事,处在这样大劫数的年头,要独立支持这么一家六口,那是如何困难的事情啊!

“总得想个办法啦!”

云普叔从来没有自馁过,每每到了这样的难关,他就把这句话不住地在自己的脑际里打磨旋,有时竟能想到一些很好的办法。今天,他

extremely difficult one, so he was again turning the words over in his mind.

"There's Mr. He, Mr. Li, Mr. Chen...." He paced back and forth at the foot of the stage, and one by one the figures of these men floated before his eyes. But how harsh and unrelenting were their faces! They inspired him with uneasiness and dread. He shook his head and sighed, casting the thought of these people aside, and turning his mind in another direction. Suddenly he remembered a person who was of a different sort.

"Liqiu, will you go right away to see Uncle Yuwu?"

"What for, Dad?" asked Liqiu nonchalantly from the door-step, where he sat cutting bamboo.

"Tomorrow the weather will be really fine and warm; everyone is planning to go into the fields. We have to start too. And the first day we should at least have a full meal. It will be a prediction of better things to come and will give us strength to do our work. But there's no more rice in the house, therefore..."

"I don't think Uncle Yuwu can do anything about it."

"Still, it won't do any harm if you go and see, will it?"

"Why bother to go there for nothing? I don't think they're any better off than we are."

"You're always talking back to your father. How do you know whether they are like us or not? I told you to go and see."

"But Dad, it's true. They are probably harder up than we are."

"Nonsense!"

Recently, Uncle Yunpu had often felt that his son was not as obedient as before. He seemed to want to argue over everything.

知道这个难关更紧了，于是又把这句话儿运用到脑里去旋转。

“何八爷，李三爷，陈老爷……”

他一步一步地在戏台下踱来踱去，这些人的影子，一个个地浮上他的脑中。然而那都是一些极难看的面孔，每一个都会使他感受到异样的不安和恐惧。他只好摇头叹气地把这些人统统丢开，将念头转向另一方面去。猛然地，他却想到了一个例外的人：

“立秋，你现在就跑到玉五叔家中去看看好吗？”

“去做什么呢，爹？”

立秋坐在门槛边剖篾，漫无意识地反问他。

“明天的日脚很好啦！人家都准备下田了，我们也应当跟着动手。头一天做功夫，总得饱饱吃一餐，兆头来能好一些，做起功夫来也比较起劲。家里现在已经没有了米，所以……”

“我看玉五叔也不见得有办法吧！”

“那末，你去看看也不要紧的喽！”

“这又何必空跑一趟呢？我看他们的情形，也并不见得比我们要好！”

“你总欢喜和老子对来！你能知道他们和我们一样吗？我是叫你去一趟呀！”

“这是实在的事实啊！爹，他们恐怕比我们还要困难哩！”

“废话！”

近来云普叔常常会觉得自己的儿子变差了，什么事情都欢喜和他抬杠。为了家中的一

Liqiu had quarreled many times with his father over ordinary household affairs. He was often quite indolent and unwilling to work, and sometimes behaved like an utterly rebellious, unfilial creature.

Uncle Yuwu was not necessarily in such drastic straits as he, because there was only Yuwu and his wife in the family, no one else. The year before, when all the peasants in the village had left and become refugees, Yuwu had stayed at home. All by himself, he had managed to eke out a living for his family of two. Furthermore, he never borrowed from anyone. Three days before, he had been seen with a basket in front of the butcher shop near the ferry. He had bought a piece of meat and some wine, and had walked on, quite pleased with himself. How could anyone say he also had no way out?

Uncle Yunpu suspected that his son was again behaving like a lazy beggar and refusing to obey orders. He was unable to suppress his anger:

"You wretch, are you going, or aren't you? You're always opposing me in one way or another!"

"It's no use going."

"You'll go if I tell you to go, and I forbid you to talk to me like that!"

Raising his head, Liqiu gently put down the knife with which he had been cutting bamboo. His young heart was heavy with hidden pain. Unable to stand the worried look on his father's face, he turned and went off without another word.

"Just say: My father sent me to ask Uncle Yuwu to please help

些琐事,不知道发生过多少次龃龉。儿子总是那样懒懒地不肯做事,有时候简直是个忤逆的,不孝的东西!

玉五叔的家中并不见得会和自己一般地没有办法。因为除了玉五婶以外,玉五叔的家中没有第三个要吃闲饭的人。去年全垄上的灾民都出去逃难了,玉五叔就没有同去,独自不动地支持了一家两口的生存。而且,也从来没有看见他向人家借贷过。大前天在渡口上曹炳生肉铺门前,还看见了他提着一只篮子,买了一点酒肉,摇头晃脑地过身。他怎么会没有办法呢?

于是云普叔知道了,这一定又是儿子发了懒筋,不肯听信自己的吩咐,不由的心头冒出火来:

"你到底去不去呢?狗养的东西,你总喜欢和老子对来!"

"去也是没有办法啦!"

"老子要你去就去,不许你说这些废话,狗入的!"

立秋抬起头来,将篾刀轻轻放下,年轻人的一颗心里蕴藏着深沉的隐痛。他不忍多看父亲焦急的面容,回转身子来就走。

"你说:我爹爹叫我来的,多少请玉五叔帮

us just a little. Once we tide over this difficult time, we'll promptly return Uncle what we owe!"

"Uh, huh!..."

The moon had just peeped out from behind the tree trunks, and in a few minutes it was again swallowed up by dark clouds. Not a single star was in sight. All around, the darkness was like a black lacquer board.

"What did Uncle Yuwu say?"

"He didn't say much. He only said: Please give my regards to your Dad. I am very sorry, but yesterday we were eating pumpkin and today there's just this bit of thin gruel left."

"Didn't you say I'd pay him back right away?"

"I did, and he even showed me their rice jar. It was empty."

"And what about his wife?"

"She smiled at me but didn't say anything."

"They're lying!" Uncle Yunpu said indignantly, pounding his fist on the little table. "Only three days before I saw him buying meat, and bless him, he says he has no rice today. Who the devil believes that!"

Nobody made a sound. Mrs. Yunpu came over, and the children strained their ears to hear the conversation. In the huge ancestral temple there was not a single light. The darkness was oppressive and weighed heavily on their spirits.

"Then what are we to do tomorrow when work in the fields must begin?" Mrs. Yunpu asked anxiously.

"There's nothing but starvation for all of us. This good-for-noth-

忙一点，过了这一个难关之后，随即就替五叔送还来。”

“唔！……”

月亮刚从树桠里钻出了半边面孔来，一霎儿又被乌云吞没。没有一颗星，四围黑得像一块漆板。

“王五叔怎样回答你的呢？”

“他没有说多的话。他只说：请你致意你的爹爹，真是对不住得很，昨天我们还是吃的老南瓜。今天，喽！就只有这一点点儿稀饭了！”

“你没有说过我不久就还他吗？”

“说过了的，他还把他的米桶给我看了。空空的！”

“那么，他的女人哩？”

“没有说话，笑着。”

“妈妈的！”云普叔在小桌子上用力地击了一拳，随即愤愤地说道：“大前天我还看见了他买肉吃，妈妈的！今天就说没有米了，鬼才相信他！”

大家都没有声息。云普婶也围了拢来，孩子们都竖着耳朵，听爹爹和哥哥说话。偌大的一所祠堂中，连一颗豆大的灯光都没有。黑暗把大家的心绪，胁迫得一阵一阵地往下沉落……

“那么明天下田又怎么办呢？”

云普婶也非常耽心地问。

“妈妈的，只有大家都饿死！这杂种出外跑

ing has been dashing about for Heaven knows how long, and hasn't brought back even a single grain of rice!"

"But Dad, what could I do?"

"Oh go and die, you worthless fool, and leave me alone!"

Having scolded his son so severely, Uncle Yunpu was immediately sorry. Die! Ah, what was the good of wishing his son dead? His heart contracted, and in spite of himself two big tears rolled down his shriveled old cheeks. He groped for his pipe, and turning around, went out.

"Where are you going, Father?"

"Are we to eat sand tomorrow or what, if I don't go out to see what I can do?"

With sorrow in their eyes the family watched the retreating back of Uncle Yunpu until it was swallowed up by darkness. One by one the children went in to sleep. Like little puppies, they tumbled down here and there in the back room, and lay quiet. Only Aunt Yunpu and Liqiu remained in the central hall, their lustreless eyes wide open in the tense atmosphere while they waited for Uncle Yunpu to return. A tightness had already started to clutch at their hearts.

Late at night, Uncle Yunpu came back with a mournful look on his face, and swung a little sack down from his back.

"Here is 3.60 dollars' worth of beans."

Three pairs of hungry eyes fixed their gaze on the little sack. Yunpu's eyes were still wet with tears.

了这么大半天,连一颗米花儿都弄不到。"

"叫我又怎么办呢,爹?"

"死!狗入的东西!"

云普叔狠狠的骂了这句之后,心中立刻就后悔起来:"死!"啊,认真地要儿子死了又有什么办法呢?心中只感到一阵阵酸楚,扑扑地不觉掉下两颗老泪!

"妈妈的!"

他顺手摸着旱烟管儿,返身朝外就走。

"到哪儿去呢,老头子?"

"妈妈的!不出去明天吃土!"

大家用了沉痛的眼光,注视着云普叔的背影,渐渐被黑暗吞蚀。孩子们渐次地和睡魔接吻了,在后房中像猪狗一般地横七竖八地倒着。堂屋中只剩了云普婶和立秋,在严厉的恐怖中,张大那失去了神光的眼睛,期待着云普叔的好消息回来。心上的弦,已经重重地扣紧了。

深夜,云普叔带着哭丧的脸色跑回来,从背上卸下来一个小小的包袱:

"妈妈的,这是三块六角钱的蚕豆!"

六条视线,一齐投射在这小小的包袱上,发出了几许饥饿的光芒!云普叔的眶儿里,还饱藏着一包满满的眼泪。

III

Standing beside the mouth of the ditch in one corner of their field, Liqiu swung his hoe lazily. Following the movement of his arms, the excess water in the field gradually flowed out of the ditch into the pond. But he felt extremely tired, and his arms were devoid of strength. Somehow his usual vitality was missing.

Everything was so uncertain. Moodily he gazed out over the fields spreading towards the distant horizon. It seemed to him that it was just no use working hard; no one could feel sure that hard work would produce anything. The years of war and flood had been a great shock to him, and everything at present made him feel lost and bewildered. Yet he could think of no way out of the distressing situation.

Dragging his hoe behind him, he stepped over to another opening of the ditch. The past rushed to his mind like an incoming tide. As he swung his hoe, every blow seemed to strike into his heart. His father was getting old and his brothers and sister were so young. All that had happened during the past four or five years showed an inevitable trend — their family was heading for disaster.

Suddenly he remembered what Cousin Big Lai, who lived in the front rooms, had whispered to him in secret some time ago. Turning it over carefully in his mind, he found that there was irrefutable logic and reason behind it. True enough, in years like these, un-

三

在田角的决口边，立秋举着无力的锄头，懒洋洋地挥动。田中过多的水，随着锄头的起落，渐渐地由决口溢入池塘。他浑身都觉得酥软，手腕也那样没有力量，往常的勇气，现在不知跑到哪里去了。

一切都渺茫哟！他怅望着原野。他觉得：现在已经不全是要下死力做功夫的时候了；谁也没有方法能够保证这种工作，会有良好的效果。历年的天灾人祸，把这颗年轻人的心房刺痛得深深的。眼前的一切，太使他感到渺茫了，而他又没有方法能把自己的生活改造，或是跳出这个不幸的圈围。

他拖着锄头，迈步移过了第三条决口，过去的事件，像潮水般地涌上他的心头。每一锄头的落地，都像是打在自家的心上。父亲老了，弟妹还是那么年轻。这四五年来，家中的末路，已经成为了如何也不可避免的事实。而出路还是那样的迷茫。他不知道要用什么方法，才可以开拓出这条迷茫的出路。

无意识地，他又想起不久以前上屋癞大哥对他鬼鬼祟祟说的那些话来，现在如果细细地把它回味，真有一些说不出来的道理：在这个年

less a person depended on himself, he had no one to depend on. The whole world was against the poor; unless the poor themselves stood up and did something, there would be no hope for them all their lives. Moreover, Big Lai had stated with great certainty that the world would belong to the poor in the near future.

Thus, Liqiu was again reminded of the extraordinary events, which had taken place four years before, when the Peasants' Association[1] was in power.

"Oh, if only that world would come again!"

He smiled. Suddenly a figure passed by him. Startled, he turned and saw Big Lai, the very person he had been thinking about.

"Hey! Where're you going, Elder Cousin?"

"Ah, Liqiu. So you folks have also started work in the fields."

"Yes, Cousin. Come, let's have a chat." Liqiu stopped swinging his hoe.

"Where's your Dad?"

"Over there carrying peat. Shaopu is with him."

"How are you people getting along these days?"

"Miserably, of course! How else? Today, there is no one home making rain hats. All three of us are working in the field. Last night, my Dad went to Mr. He and borrowed ten catties of beans

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① In 1926-1927 when the Chinese Communist Party co-operated with the Kuomintang and started the Northern Expedition against feudal warlords, Peasants' Associations were formed in many provinces to oppose the landlords and demand land. These associations were suppressed after the Kuomintang betrayed the revolution.

头,不靠自己,还有什么人好靠呢?什么人都是穷人的对头,自己不起来干一下子,一辈子也别想出头。而且癞大哥还肯定地说过:不久的世界,一定是我们穷人的!

这样,又使立秋回想到四年前农民会当权的盛况:

"要是再有那样的世界来哟!"

他微笑了。突然地有一条人影从他的身边掠过,使他吃了一惊!回头来看,正是他所系念的上屋癞老大。

"喂!大哥,到哪里去呢?"

"呵!立秋,你们今天也下了田吗?"

"是的,大哥!来,我们谈谈。"

立秋将锄头停住。

"你爹爹呢?"

"在那边挑草皮子,还有少普。"

"你们这几天怎样过门的呀?"

"还不是苦,今天家里已经没有人编斗笠,我们三个都下田了。昨晚,爹爹跑到何八那里求借了一斗豆子回来,才算是把今天下田的一

which gave us a meal of a sort before we came to work. Otherwise...."

"You're not doing so badly. You still manage to borrow beans from Mr. He."

"Who wants to borrow from him? Never again! My Dad had to beg and beg. He kowtowed too, and promised to pay a higher price. And how about you people, Cousin?"

"We too find it hard to manage from one day to the next."

A minute's silence and then the customary smile again returned to Cousin Big Lai's face. He nodded to Liqiu and said: "Let's continue our chat this evening, Liqiu."

"All right."

After Big Lai hurried off, Liqiu continued his work. His hoe swung up and down in the field, from one part of the ditch to another. The sun hung high up in the sky as if to inform the people that it was already noon. The sound of singing voices, so long absent in the village, was again floating in the air. Tired, the peasants made their way home; but smoke — the sign of food cooking — emerged from only very few huts.

Yunpu's body ached all over although the day before when carrying peat he had only made some twenty or thirty trips. His legs and shoulders hurt as if hundreds of sharp needles were sticking into his joints. The pain and discomfort kept him awake practically all night. When he got up at dawn he felt worn and limp. However, he composed himself and pretended there was nothing unusual for fear that signs of weakness on his part would discourage his sons.

"After all, I am getting old," he pondered sorrowfully.

餐弄饱了，要不然……”

“还好还好！何八的豆子还肯借给你们！”

“谁愿意去借他的东西！妈妈的，我爹爹不知道说了多少好话！磕了头！又加了价！……唉！大哥，你们呢？”

“一样地不能过门啊！”

沉静了一刹那。癞大哥又恢复了他那种经常微笑的面容，向立秋点头了一下：

“晚上我们再谈吧，立秋！”

“好的。”

癞大哥匆匆走后，立秋的锄头，仍旧不住地在田边挥动，一条决口又一条决口。太阳高高地悬在当空，像是告诉着人们已经到了正午。大半年来不曾听见的歌声，又悠扬地交响着。人们都拖着疲倦的身子回来，很少的屋顶上，能有缕缕的炊烟冒出。

云普叔浑身都发痛了，虽然昨天只挑了二三十担草皮子。肩和两腿的骨髓中间，像着了无数的针刺，几乎终夜都不能安眠。天亮爬起来，走路还是一阵阵地酸软。然而，他还是镇静着；尽量地在装着没事的样子，生怕儿子们看见了气馁！

“到底老了啊！”他暗自地伤心着。

From the kitchen, Liqiu brought out two bowls of what remained of the beans, and placed them on the table. The smell of the cooked beans made Uncle Yunpu's mouth water; the three who were working the fields shared the light repast equally, getting over half a bowl each. It tasted much more delicious than usual, but half a bowl was, after all, such a small quantity that when tucked away in the stomach, filled only Heaven knows how small a corner.

The men went to the fields and struggled for a while, exerting great efforts of will, as if to make up for their waning physical powers. They felt as if they were shouldering a heavy yoke which was weighing them down. They could barely manage to lift even a hoe or a small wooden plough. From time to time stars appeared before their eyes and the world would start to go in circles. After a few rounds, the men were forced to return home.

"How can we go on like this?"

The family gathered together, children as well as grown-ups. Six pairs of eyes red from the gnawing pangs of hunger stared at one another sorrowfully. All felt that there was nothing to say.

"Oh, Heaven!"

Gritting his teeth and summoning the remainder of his fading courage, Yunpu again turned his steps towards Mr. He's. On the way he figured out how he was going to approach Mr. He and what he was going to say, mentally going over the whole scene step by step. Then he found himself at Mr. He's door.

"Well, what is it you want, Yunpu?" Mr. He asked, as he sat enthroned in his massive armchair.

立秋从里面捧出两碗仅有的豆子来摆在桌子上，香气把云普叔的口水都馋得欲流出来。三个人平均分配，一个只吃了上半碗，味道却比平常的特别好吃。半碗，究竟不知道塞在肚皮里的哪一个角角儿。

勉强跑到田中去挣扎了一会，浑身就像驮着千斤闸一般地不能动弹。连一柄锄头，一张耙，都提不起来了，眼睛时时欲发昏，世界也像要天旋地转了一样。兜了三个圈子，终于被肚子驱逐回来。

“这样子下去，怎么得了呢？”

孩子和大人都集在一块，大大小小的眼睛里通通冒出血红的火焰来。互相地怅望了一会，都觉得没有什么好说的话。

“天哪！……”

云普叔咬紧牙关，鼓起了最后的勇气来，又向何八爷的庄上走去。路上，他想定了这一次见了八爷应当怎样地向他开口，一步一步地打算得妥贴了，然后走进那座庄门。

“你到底有什么事情呢，云普？”

八爷坐在太师椅上问。

"I — I. . . ."

"What?"

"I would like again to ask Mr. He. . ."

"Beans? I can't lend you any more. There're many people in this village, you know. Do you think I want to feed your family alone?"

"I'll return the debt with added interest."

"Who cares for your interest? You think other people don't pay interest? It's no use."

"Please, Mr. He, you must save us. Neither old nor young have eaten in my family. . . ."

"Go away, how can I bother so much about you! Go away!"

"Mr. He, oh, save us. . ."

Uncle Yunpu burst into desperate tears. Mr. He's hired hand came out and pushed him out of the door.

"How dare you come here and cry, and bring us bad luck, you old devil!" said the hired hand fiercely, banging the door in his face.

Dragging his feet along one after the other, Uncle Yunpu made his way home. He muttered recriminations against himself, reproaching himself for not saying the things he had planned to say and for not broaching the subject gradually step by step. Now he had bungled the whole thing and got nothing out of his visit.

At the foot of the Square Pond he suddenly stopped in his tracks. Gazing longingly at this dark green pond, he was seized with a strong impulse to take a simple little jump into the water and thus end the remaining sad bit of his life. But the thought of his

“我，我，我……”

“什么？……”

“我想再向八爷……”

“豆子吗？那不能再借给你了！垄上这么多人口，我单养你一家！”

“我可以加利还八爷！”

“谁希罕你的利，人家就没有利吗？那不能行呀！”

“八爷！你老人家总得救救我，我们一家大小已经……”

“去，去！我哪里管得了你这许多！去吧！”

“八爷，救救我！……”

云普叔急的哭出声来了。八爷的长工跑出来，把他推到大门外。

“号丧！你这老鬼！”

长工恶狠狠地骂了一句，随即把大门掩上了。

云普叔一步挨一步地走回来，自怨自艾地嘟哝着：为什么不遵照预先想定的那些话，一句一句地去说出来，以致把事情弄得没有一点结果。目前的难关，还有什么方法能够渡过呢？

走到四方塘的口上，他突然地站住了脚，望了一望这油绿色的池塘。要不是丢不下这大大

family, the old and the young, kept him from taking the plunge.

Aunt Yunpu and the children stood by the entrance of the ancestral temple, anxiously waiting for the appearance of Uncle Yunpu, who, they trusted, would bring them good news. Pangs of hunger burned within them like a consuming flame. Their eyes were red and they felt dizzy.

Jingqing, otherwise known as Baldy, came into the room, accompanied by a man with a thick beard. Immediately, Uncle Yunpu felt as if a thousand sharp daggers had been thrust into his heart. His legs and hands shook nervously, and tears streamed down his face. Having ushered the guests into the front room and seated them on a bench, he took himself into a corner and stood there. Aunt Yunpu was still hiding inside. Her eyes had long since become red and swollen from weeping. The two younger children, too weak to get up, were still in bed; their thin pale faces were as yellow as wilted cabbage leaves.

Liqiu stood near the door with Shaopu behind him. The eyes of both were wet. They looked at the bearded man dully and quickly turned their heads away.

After a few minutes of silence the bearded man said impatiently: "Baldy, where is the child?"

"She's still inside. A ten-year-old called Yingying." The bald-headed man nodded as if to tell him not to be impatient.

Aunt Yunpu emerged from the back room, walking as if her feet were dragging a half-ton weight, and holding in her hands a little suit of clothes, newly patched. She was trembling so much she was

小小的一群，他真想就是这么跳下去，了却他这条残余的生命！

云普婶和孩子们倚立在祠堂的门口，盼望着云普叔的好消息。饥饿燃烧着每个人的内心，像一片狂阔的火焰。眼睛红得发了昏，巴巴地，还望不见带着喜信回来的云普叔。

天哪！假如这个时候有一位能够给他们吃一顿饱饭的仙人！

镜清秃子带了一个满面胡须的人走进屋来，云普叔的心中，就像有千万把利刀在那儿穿钻。手脚不住地发抖，眼泪一串一串地滚下来。让进了堂屋，随便地拿了一条板凳给他们坐下，自己另外一边站着。云普婶还躲在里面没有起来，眼睛早已哭得红肿了。孩子们，小的两个都躺着不能爬起来，脸上黄瘦得同枯萎了的菜叶一样。

立秋靠着门边，少普站在哥哥的后面，眼睛都湿润润的。他们失神地望了一望这满面胡须的人，随即又把头转向另一方面去。

沉寂了一会，那胡子像耐不住似地：

"镜清，那孩子现在在哪里呢？"

"还在里面啊！十岁，名叫英英姐。"秃子点点头，像叫他不要性急。

云普婶从里面踱出来，脚有一千斤重，手中拿着一身补好了的小衣裤，战栗得失掉了主持。

hardly able to make her way across the room. Catching sight of the bald-headed man, she somehow managed to address him. Then hot tears welled out of her eyes and she was unable to go on. Yunpu quietly hid his face in his sleeves and both Liqiu and Shaopu hung their heads and wept silently.

The bald-headed man became worried. Glancing quickly at his companion, he turned to Aunt Yunpu and said comfortingly:

"Why should you feel so heartbroken, Sister? Won't Yingying be better off to go along with Mr. Xia than at home? She'll have plenty of food and clothing and if she happens to get a good master, she'll live a comfortable life. Didn't all go well with Guisheng's daughter, Ju'er, and Ling Daosan's Taoxiu? Besides, Mr. Xia..."

"Cousin, now I feel I just simply cannot sell her. Last year when we were so hard up, we even went begging to Hubei, but we still refused to sell her. There's more reason why I can't sell her this year. She, my baby Ying, my flesh and blood, oh..."

"Ah!" said Xia, the bearded man, shooting a quick glance at Baldy.

"What, Yunpu?" cut in Baldy hurriedly. "Changed your mind? Last night it was all decided..." But before he finished the sentence Mrs. Yunpu rushed at her husband crying and cursing at the same time:

"It's all your fault, you old devil! You can't even support your children and you call yourself a man! Now that you have nothing to put into your stomach, you go ahead and sell my daughter! Oh, you're just good for nothing, and fit only to die. Oh, you wretch! We might as well all die together and be done with it. Sell my

一眼看见秃子，刚刚喊出一声“镜清伯！……”便哇的一声，迸出了两行如雨的眼泪来，再说不出一句话了。云普叔用袖子偷偷地扪着脸。立秋和少普也垂头呜咽地饮泣着！

秃子慌张了，急急地瞧了那胡子一眼，回头对云普婶安慰似地说：

“嫂嫂！你何必要这样伤心呢？英英同这位夏老爷去了，还不比在家里好吗！吃的穿的，说不定还能落得一个好主子，享福一生。桂生家的菊儿，林道三家的桃秀，不都是好好地去了吗？并且，夏老爷……”

“伯伯！我，我现在是不能卖了她的！去年我们讨米到湖北，那样吃苦都没有肯卖。今年我更加不能卖了，她，我的英儿，我的肉！呜！……”

“哦！”

夏胡子钉了秃子一眼。

“云普！怎么？变了卦吗？昨晚还说得好好的。……”秃子急急地追问云普叔。话还没有说完，云普婶连哭带骂地向云普叔扑来了：

“老鬼！都是你不好！养不活儿女，做什么鸡巴人！没有饭吃了来设法卖我的女儿！你自己不死！老鬼，来！大家拚死了落得一个干净！

daughter, will you? No, a thousand times no!"

"Didn't you agree to it last night? I didn't make the decision alone. Baldy, isn't she a shrew!" Yunpu backed away from his wife, his face stained with tears.

"Let's go," said the bearded man impatiently. He stood up.

But Baldy quickly stopped him: "Wait a little. She'll think better of it in a moment. Come, Yunpu, let's talk outside."

Baldy dragged Uncle Yunpu away, but Mrs. Yunpu continued to cry and rave. Liqiu went up to her and helped her to a bench. He knew that the factors leading to this tragedy were not simple. The family had had nothing to eat for three days. No one wanted to buy rain hats any more, yet the work in the field could not be left undone. Therefore when Baldy came last night and made the proposition, Liqiu had not opposed it with much heat. Although he was heartbroken about his sister and hated to have her sold, there was no other way to help them out of the present predicament outside of this last resort. He had lain awake the whole night, torn by the sorrow and conflict in his heart. He had felt that he couldn't bear to even look at his poor little sister who was soon to be sold, and had got up before daybreak. Now that his mother was crying so bitterly, he had not the heart to tell her that it was all necessary and unavoidable.

"Come, Mama, just let them go!"

Mrs. Yunpu made no reply. Baldy and Uncle Yunpu returned; once again everyone was silent.

"Well, Sister, what is your final decision?" asked Baldy.

"Cousin, will my Yingying be able to come home sometime once

想卖我女儿万万不能!"

"妈妈的!你昨晚不也说过了吗?又不是我一个人作主的。秃子,你看她泼不泼!"云普叔连忙退了几步,脸上满糊着眼泪。

"走吧!镜清。"

夏胡子不耐烦似地起身说。秃子连忙把他拦住了:

"等一等吧,过一会她就会想清的。来!云普,我和你到外面去说几句话。"

秃子把云普叔拉走了。云普婶还是呜呜地哭闹着。立秋走上来扶住了她,坐在一条短凳子上。他知道,这场悲剧构成的原因并不简单,一家人足足的有三天没有吃东西了。斗笠没有人要,田中的耕种又不能荒芜。所以昨晚镜清秃子来游说的时候,他并没有表示如何激烈的反对。虽然他伤心妹子,不愿意妹子卖给人家,可是,除此以外,再没有方法能够解救目前的危急。他在沉痛的矛盾心理中,憧憬一终夜,他不忍多看一眼那快要被卖掉的妹子,天还没亮,他就爬起来。现在,母亲既然这样地伤心,他还有什么心肝敢说要把妹子卖掉呢?

"妈妈,算了吧!让他们走好了。"

云普婶没有回答。秃子和云普叔也从头门口走进来,大家又沉默了一会。

"嫂嫂!到底怎么办呢?"秃子说。

"镜清伯伯呀!我的英英去了她还能回来吗?"

she is gone?"

"She will if she finds a master near by. Besides, you people can go to see her often."

"But if she has to go far?"

"That will not happen, Sister."

"It's all the old devil's fault, why didn't he die an early death..."

Yingying came out from the back room carrying baby Sixi in her arms. With surprise and suspicion she glanced at the strange scene around her. She handed the baby to her mother and then stared at everyone in the room with big round eyes.

With the exception of the two outsiders, all present were again seized with heartache and remorse.

"Is she the one?" asked Xia, the bearded man, who, having been nudged by Baldy, now began to stare at Yingying.

After much negotiation, Xia agreed to pay only two dollars for each year of the child's life. Yingying was ten, so the price was set at twenty dollars. Both parties had to pay one dollar each to Baldy as commission.

"Ah, ah! What kind of a world is this?"

Uncle Yunpu held the nineteen pieces of snow white silver in his hand, but he was so stunned by what had happened that he turned numb as a wooden block. With one sleeve he kept wiping the tears that welled from his eyes, and at the same time he stared unbelievingly at the money. "Oh, God! Is this the money for my precious, my Yingying!"

Mrs. Yunpu changed Yingying into the clean patched suit and

“可以的，假如主子近的话。并且，你们还可以常常去看她！”

“远呢？”

“不会的哟！嫂嫂。”

“都是这老鬼不好，他不早死！……”

英英抱着四喜儿从里面跑出来了，很惊疑地接触了这个奇异的环境！随手将四喜儿交给了妈妈，瞪着一双圆溜溜的眼睛四围张望。

大家又是一阵心痛，除了镜清秃子和夏胡子以外。

“就是她吗？”夏胡子被秃子拌了一下，望着英英说。

几番谈判的结果，夏胡子一岁只肯出两块钱。英英是十岁，二十块。另外双方各给秃子一块钱的介绍费。

“啊啊！这是一个什么世界哟！”

十九块雪白的光洋，落到云普叔的手上，他惊骇得同一只木头鸡一样。用袖子尽力地把眼泪擦干，仔细地将洋钱看了一会。

“天啊！这洋钱就是我的宝宝英英吗？”

云普婶把挂好了的一套衣裤给英英换上，

told her that she was going to Uncle Xia's house to have a few good meals and that she'd be coming back. But still Yingying could not hold back the rapidly flowing tears.

"Mama, can I come home tomorrow? I don't want to go away alone and have things to eat."

With tears in their eyes the family kept looking at Yingying. They couldn't take their eyes off her. It was, after all, their last look at their little girl.

After Baldy had taken Yingying away, Mrs. Yunpu behaved as one completely possessed. Several times she started out as if to chase after them. They heard Yingying turn back and call to them from a distance: "Oh, Mama, I don't want to have a full stomach all by myself! I want to come home tomorrow... "

Thus, for the time being, the family was able to keep alive. With the nineteen dollars they bought a little over two piculs of grain. It was enough to feed the five members of the family for about sixty days or more. The father and sons had to work hard on the farm to find new sources of income.

It was three days before Qing Ming that the sowing was to begin, but there was not a single household in the village that had the seeds to sow. For the solution of this problem, Mr. He went to the county seat to seek out county magistrate. Unless the sowing was done in time there would be no harvest in the autumn.

Everyone was expecting good news from Mr. He. In this, the people knew they would not be disappointed, because every year they had been able to get seeds on loan. The county magistrate

告诉她是到夏伯伯家中去吃几天饭就转来，然而英英的眼泪究竟没有方法止住。

“妈妈，我明天就可以回来吗？我不要一个人吃饱饭啊！”

大家都目不转睛地噙着泪水对英英注视着。再多看一两眼吧，这是最后的相见啊！

秃子把英英带走，云普婶真的发了疯，几回都想追上去。远远地还听到英英回头叫了两声：

“妈妈呀！我不要一个人吃饱饭！”

“我明天就要转来的呀！”

“…………”

生活暂时地维持下来了，十九块钱，只能买到两担多一点谷，五个人，可够六七十天的吃用。新的出路，还是欲靠父子们自己努力地开拓出来。

清明泡种期只差三天了，垄上都没有一家人有种谷，何八爷特为这件事亲自到县库里去找太爷去商量。不及时下种，秋季便没有收成。

大家都伫望着何八爷的好消息，不过这是不会失望的，因为年年都借到了。县太爷自己

himself was clearly aware that "the magistrates depend on the people, and the people depend on the land." If nothing was done about seeds for sowing, in the end no one would benefit. Therefore Mr. He was readily able to get the magistrate's promise whereby one thousand piculs of grain were to be issued to Caojialong to be handled by Mr. He.

"What! The seed grain costs eleven dollars per picul, on top of which the money must be repaid at 4 per cent interest? This must be the work of that scoundrel He."

All the villagers were cursing He, but all of them, nevertheless, quietly carried off seed grain from his house.

Life and work soon engulfed the village in an ever increasing whirl of activity. The people were all struggling desperately; all their hopes lay in the great coming harvest.

Ⅳ

The seedlings were transplanted, then the fields were weeded twice. But Heaven again made sport of the hardships of the poor. For more than ten days there was not even the slightest drizzle. The sun hung in the air like a ball of fire. The water in the fields had dried up; the soil was only slightly moist.

Having sold his daughter and obtained seed grain on loan, Uncle Yunpu worked hard to get his seedlings transplanted. By now he was so busy he could hardly find time to breathe. He still had no notion as to where to get fertilizer, and nature had not been generous with rain. Really, it was worrisome. If it was going to be a

也明白:“官出于民,民出于土!”种子不设法,一年到了头大家都捞不着好处的。所以何八爷一说就很快地答应下来了。发一千担种谷给曹家垄,由何八爷总管。

“妈妈的,种谷十一块钱一担,还要四分利,这完全是何八这狗杂种的盘剥!”

每个人都是这样地愤骂,每个都在何八爷庄上挑出谷子来。生活和工作,加紧地向这农村中捶击起来。人们都在拚命地挣扎,因为他们已将一切的希望,完全寄托在这伟大的秋收。

四

插好田,刚刚扯好二头草,天老爷又要和穷人们作对——一连十多天不见一点麻麻雨,太阳悬在空中,像一团烈火一样。田里没有水了,仅仅只泥土有些湿润的。

卖了女儿,借了种谷,好容易才把田插好,云普叔这时候已经忙碌得透不过气来,肥料还没有着落,天又不肯下雨了,实在急人!假如真

drought year, they must make preparations early.

He told Liqiu to go up on the stage and bring the water-wheel down so that they could mend them. If in three more days there was no rain, it would be impossible to get along without using the water-wheel.

Everyone was praying in his heart: Oh Heaven, please take pity on us and send us just a little bit of rain.

One day, two days... how hard-hearted Heaven was! He just pretended not to hear the people's prayers. The horizon was still cloudless and the burning sun seemed to challenge very existence of the universe. Scorched by the sun, everything had begun to wilt. The soil in the fields dried up; now and again one would come across a great crack which looked like the gaping mouth of some ferocious animal panting and emitting a burning hot breath.

The fields could wait no longer. The splashing of water-wheels could be heard in both Zhangjiazhai and at Xindukou. The seedlings hung their heads as if complaining about their thirst. Their blades had become dry and curled up.

After breakfast, Uncle Yunpu walked to the Square Pond in silence, carrying the frame of the water-wheel, his two sons beside him carrying the other parts of the water-wheel. The sun beating on their backs made their flesh burn and itch. Even the ground underfoot was scorching hot.

The sound of water-wheels turning came from all directions. The water in the ponds was being transported to the fields by manpower. Uncle Yunpu fixed his water-wheel and father and sons got on. The wheel started to move, water went up the track and flowed into

的要闹天干的话，还得及早准备一下哩！

他吩咐立秋到戏台上把车叶子取下，修修好。再过三天没有雨，不车水是不可能的事啊！

人们心中都祈祷着：天老爷啊，请你老人家可怜我们降一点儿雨沫吧！

一天，两天，天老爷的心肠也真硬！人们的祈祷，他竟假装没有听见，仍旧是万里无云。火样的太阳，将宇宙的存在都逗引得发了暴躁。什么东西，在这个时候，也都现出了由于热而枯萎的象征。田中的泥土干涸了，很多的已经绽破了不可弥缝的裂痕，张开着，像一条一条的野兽的口，喷出来阵阵的热气。

实在没有方法再挨延了，张家坨、新渡口都有了水车的响声，禾苗垂头丧气地在向人们哀告它的苦况。很多的叶子已经卷了筒。去年大水留下来的苦头还没有吃了，今年谁还肯眼巴巴地望着它干死呢！就拚了性命也是要挣扎一下子的啊！

吃了早饭，云普叔亲自肩着长车，立秋抗了车架，少普提着几串车叶子，默默地向四方塘走来。太阳晒在背上，只感到一阵热热的刺痛，连地上的泥土，都烫得发了烧。

"妈妈的！怎么这样热。"

四面都是水车声音，池塘里的水，尽量在用人工转运到田中去。云普叔的车子也安置好了。三个人一齐踏上，车轮转动着，水都由车箱子里爬出来，争先恐后地向田中飞跑。

the fields.

The peasants were covered with sweat from head to foot. The sun gradually travelled to the middle of the sky and blazed upon the earth like a fierce fire. Little wisps of blue smoke seemed to curl up from the people's mouths. Their feet felt heavier and heavier. Eventually the water-wheel seemed as heavy as a half-ton rock and it required ever so much effort to press down on the foot pedals. Starting upwards from the ankles, the aching of the muscles spread over the whole body, finally reaching the neck. At times, it felt as if a little knife was cutting and scraping the ankles and the legs. It was especially hard for Shaopu, whose not yet full-grown young body suffered agonies. Yunpu too — was he not feeling just as tired? His feeble old legs were tired through and through before the work had proceeded more than a few minutes. But he refused to show any signs of weakness. If Heaven wanted him to suffer, he had to bear it even if it meant giving up his old life. The morale of his sons depended on his courage. Besides, it was the first day they worked the water-wheels, and he couldn't afford to set them a bad example by groaning and complaining. He had to bear up no matter how much he was suffering. "Step hard, Shaopu!" He kept on reminding his younger son, while he himself gritted his teeth and stepped hard. When the pain in his legs was too much to bear, he would let the long restrained tears flow, and they would roll down his cheeks mixed with the sweat from his brows.

At long last Aunt Yunpu arrived with their lunch. The father and sons got off the water-wheel.

"Heaven, why must you always work against us poor people?"

汗从每一个人的头顶一直流到脚跟。太阳看看移到了当顶,火一般地燎烧着大地。人们的口里,时常有缕缕的青烟冒出。脚下也渐渐地沉重了,水车踏板就像一块千斤重的岩石,拚性命都踏不下来。一阵阵的酸痛,由脚筋传布到全身,到脑顶。又像是有人拿着一把小刀子在那里割肉挖筋一般的难过。尤其是少普,在他那还没有发育得完全的身体中,更加感受着异样的苦痛。云普叔又何尝不是一样呢?衰老的几根脚骨头,本来踏上三五步就有些挨不起了的,然而,他不能气馁呀!老天爷叫他吃苦,死也得去!儿子们的勇气,完全欲靠他自己鼓起来。况且,今天还是头一次上紧,他怎么好自己首先叫苦呢?无论如何受罪,都得忍受下来哟!

"用劲呀,少普!……"

他常常是这样地提醒着小的儿子,自己却咬紧牙关地用力踏下去。真是痛的忍不住了,才将那含蓄着很久了的眼泪流出来,和着汗珠儿一同滴下。

好容易云普婶的午饭送来了,父子们都从车上爬下来。

"天啊!你为什么偏偏要和我们穷人作对呢?"

Yunpu queried, as he lightly massaged his aching legs.

"Mama," Shaopu said to his mother with a woeful face, "my two legs are already useless."

"Never mind, have a good meal now and come back home early in the afternoon. With a little rest you'll be all right again."

Shaopu said nothing more. He took up a bowl and filled it full of rice.

Uncle Yunpu and Shaopu were practically cripples after the hard labour of those few days. And Heaven remained as hard-hearted as ever! The water churned up each day was enough only to keep the seedlings from dying on that particular day. Liqiu was the strongest of them all. He was not tormented by the aches and sores that bothered his father and brother. But he continued to be indolent and unwilling to exert his strength, as if such labour as the turning of the water-wheels and the working of the fields was not the kind of thing he preferred doing. He was often away from home. When his father wanted him for something, it was necessary to look all around for him. Uncle Yunpu was therefore doubly vexed with him: "He is a lazy-bones, a rebellious, unfilial good-for-nothing!"

The moon emerged from behind the tree leaves and scattered its sheaves of silvery light. It was no longer as hot as during the day; a gentle breeze whispered in the fields. Besides some women and children there were a few people sitting leisurely around to get a breath of air.

Taking advantage of the cool moonlit night, people were doing a double amount of work. The sound of water-wheels splashing mixed

云普叔抚摸着自己的腿子。少普哭丧脸地望着他的母亲：

“妈妈，我的这两条腿子已经没有用了呢！”

“不要紧的哟！现在多吃一点饭，下午早些回来，憩息一会，就会好的。”

少普也没有再作声，顺手拿起一只碗来盛饭吃。

连日的辛劳，云普叔和少普都弄得同跛脚人一样了。天还一样的狠心！一天功夫车下来的水，仅仅只够维持到一天禾苗的生命。立秋算是最能得力的人了，他没有感到过父亲和弟弟那般的苦痛。然而，他总是懒懒地不肯十分努力做功夫，好像车水种田，并不是他现在应做的事情一样。常常不在家，有什么事情要到处去寻找。因此使云普叔加倍地恼恨着：“这是一个懒精！忤逆不孝的杂种！”

月亮从树尖上涌出来，在黑暗的世界中散布了一片银灰色的光亮。夜晚并没有白天那般炎热，田野中时常有微风吹动。外面很少有纳凉的闲人，除了妇人和几个孩子。

人们都趁着这个风清月白的夜晚来加紧他们的工作。四面水车的声音，杂和着动人的歌

with melodious singing could be distinctly heard. To the peasants, summer nights were marvellous for field work; no heat, hubbub or confusion as during the day.

Uncle Yunpu, again unable to find Liqiu, was as mad as a bull which had seen red. At dinner he had told Liqiu that since it was a fine evening they must plan to put in some night work. He hoped Liqiu would not go gadding about again. Who would have thought that the lad would again disappear in the twinkling of an eye and leave Uncle Yunpu mad enough to burst! Recently, several people had come to Uncle Yunpu to tell him that his son, Liqiu, had gone bad, and that they didn't know what he did every night running around with Big Lai and his kind. They all advised Yunpu to use a strong hand with his son before something serious happened. Uncle Yunpu had listened; several times he had become so enraged he could have bit his tongue off. The more he thought about it now, the angrier he got. He went up and down the village calling for Liqiu but there was no answer. He failed to catch even the slightest glimpse of the boy. Then he told Shaopu to go along ahead, and wait for them at the water-wheel. Even if he couldn't find Liqiu, the two of them together would have to get to work and pump some water into the fields. Gritting his teeth with rage he went out again to look for that unfilial son of his.

He made a few more rounds, but there was still no trace of Liqiu. He turned back in disgust. Then suddenly, from the distance he heard their water-wheel turning. Rushing back, he saw that Liqiu and Shaopu were already busily working the wheels. Choking with rage, he was at first unable to utter a word. But after

曲，很清晰的可以送入到人们的耳鼓中来。夏夜是太适宜于农人们的工作了，没有白昼的嚣张、炎热、喧扰……

云普叔又因为寻不着立秋，暴躁得像一条发了狂的蛮牛一样。吃晚饭时曾好好地嘱咐他过，今夜天气很好，一定要做做夜工，才许再跑到外面去。谁知一转眼就不看见人，真把云普叔的肚皮都气破了。近来常有一些人跑来对云普叔说：立秋这个孩子变坏了，不知道他天天跑出去，和癞老大他们这班人弄做一起干些什么勾当。个个都劝他严厉地管束一下，以免弄出大事。云普叔听了，几回硬恨不得把牙门都咬碎下来。现在，他越想越暴躁，从上村叫到下村，连立秋的影子都没有看到。他回头吩咐少普先到水车上去等着他，假如寻不到的话，光老小两个也是要车几线水上田的。于是他重新地把牙根咬紧，准备去和这不孝的东西拚一拚老性命。

又兜了三四个大圈子还没有寻到，只好气愤愤地走回来。远远地，忽然听到自己的水车声音响了，急忙赶上去，车上坐的不正是立秋和少普吗？他愤恨得说不出一句话来，半晌，才下死劲地骂道：

a pause he shouted furiously: "You worthless wretch, where have you been keeping youself!"

"What? Am I not here working the water-wheel as I should be?" Liqiu replied gravely.

Uncle Yunpu gave him a fierce look and with an oath climbed up on the wheel himself to join in the work.

The moon crept further up the tree tops and gradually moved towards the west. Slowly, silence took over the fields.

In the east, pearl-white clouds had already made their appearance. A few stars were still lingering in the sky, blinking and twinkling away. The cock had crowed twice. Uncle Yunpu sat up in the dark and sighed deeply after gazing at the pale sky. Hard work both day and night had left him feeling as if he simply could not keep it up any longer. His bones and muscles all seemed to ache even in his dreams, but nevertheless he world not relax for a minute nor would he complain about fatigue for fear such weakness would affect his sons.

The demands of livelihood lashed him onwards to toil and toil. He could blame no one for it. Now at least he had within his grasp a bit of new hope. He could now look forward to the autumn. Perhaps then, he would be able to realize his dreams.

But at present it was necessary for him to get up very early. It was still summer, a long time before autumn and that world of his dreams.

His children slept as soundly as piglets. How deeply the young slumber! How he envied them their sweet dreams! However, for

“你这狗入的杂种！这会子到哪里收尸去了？”

“噎！我不是好好地坐在这里车水吗？”立秋很庄严地回答着。

“妈妈的！”

云普叔用力地钉了他一眼，随即自己也爬上来，踏上了轮子。

月亮由树尖升到了树顶，渐渐地向西方泻落！田野中也慢慢地慢慢地沉静了下来。

东方已经浮上了鱼肚色的白云，几颗疏散的星儿，还在天空中挤眉弄眼地闪动。雄鸡啼过两次了，云普叔从黑暗里爬起来，望望还没有天亮，悠长地舒了一口冷气。日夜的辛劳，真使他有些感到支持不住了。周身的筋骨，常常在梦中隐隐地作痛。但他无论如何也不肯懈怠一刻功夫，或说几句关于疲劳痛痒的话。因为他怕给儿子们一个不好的印象。

生活鞭策着他劳动，他是毫不能怨尤的哟！现在他算是已经把握到一线新的希望了：他还可以希望秋天，秋天到了，便能实现他所梦想的世界！

现在，他不能不很早就爬起来啦。这还是夏天，隔秋天，隔那梦想的世界还远着哩！

孩子们正睡得同猪猡一样。年轻人在梦中总是那么甜蜜哟！他真是羡慕着。为了秋收，

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the harvest in autumn, for that dream world, he had to harden his heart and wake his sons even before the new day had scarcely begun.

"Hey, get up, Liqiu!"

"..."

"Shaopu, Shaopu, it's time to get up."

"What is it, Dad? It's not even dawn yet," muttered Shaopu stirring in his sleep.

"It's long since daybreak. We must go and work the waterwheels."

"But we're just fallen asleep. I haven't even had time to turn over. How can it be daybreak so soon?"

"Liqiu, Liqiu!"

"..."

"Get up!"

"Uh, huh..."

"Hey, get up, you laggard!"

Finally Uncle Yunpu had to pull them up by the ears before he could get them out of bed.

"What's the matter with you, it's still pitch dark outside!" said Liqiu, discovering that it was not yet light. He rubbed his eyes and felt extremely annoyed.

"You lazy-bones, it took me all this time to wake you, and now you complain about its being too early!"

"'Get up, get up!' I don't know what we get up in the dark for. We can toil our lives away, but we'll only be slaving for others."

为了那个梦想的世界，虽然天还没有十分发亮，他不得不忍心地将儿子们统统叫起来：

“起来哟，立秋！”

“…………”

“少普，少普！起来哟！”

“什么事情呀？爹！天还没有亮哩！”少普被叫醒了。

“天早已亮了，我们车水去！”

“刚刚才睡下，连身子都没有翻过来，就天亮了吗？唔！……”

“立秋！立秋！”

“…………”

“起来呀！……”

“唔！”

“喂！起来呀！狗入的东西！”

最后云普叔是用手去拖着每一儿子的耳朵，才把他们拉起来的。

“见鬼了，四面全是黑漆漆的！”

立秋揉揉眼睛，才知道是天还没有光，心中老大不高兴。

“狗杂种！叫了半天才把你叫起来，你还不服气吧！妈妈的！”

“起来！起来！不知道黑夜里爬起来做些什么事？拚死了这条性命，也不过是替人家当个奴隶！”

“你这懒精！谁作人家的奴隶？”

“不是吗？打禾下来，看你能够落到手几粒

"You're just lazy. Who's slaving for others?"

"We are. Isn't it so? Once the rice is threshed, see how much you get from crop."

"Nonsense. I suppose you think a bunch of robbers will come and take everything? You're a fool, and you're just talking rubbish. You've been doing nothing but gadding about outside lately. You're so irresponsible you neglect everything at home. You've changed for the worse. People all say you are mixing with Big Lai and his likes all the time. You've probably become what they call a... communist!"

Uncle Yunpu was really angry. He wanted to grab his son by the neck and give him a good beating so as to relieve the pent-up anger within him. His voice grew louder and louder as he fumed and cursed. Aunt Yunpu was also awakened.

"What are you fussing about in the middle of the night? The children have worked hard all day. You should at least let them sleep a while. Look, it's not even daylight yet."

"It's all your fault, you old witch, you produced these good-for-nothing devils."

"Whom are you cursing?"

"It's you I'm cursing. You do nothing but spoil them."

"All right! You hate them, do you? Take them and kill them one by one! Why torture them to death slowly? Or else you can sell them all so that they won't be eyesores to you any longer. But why fuss and fume like this in the middle of the night?"

Uncle Yunpu was now in a towering rage. He felt that recently his wife had been unreasonably lenient with the children, to the

捞什子?"

"鬼话！妈妈的,难道会有一批强盗来抢去你的吗?你这个咬烂鸡巴横嚼的杂种！你近来专在外面抛尸,家中的什么事情都不要管！只晓得发懒筋,你变了！狗东西！人家都说你专和癞老大他们在一起鬼混！你一定变做了什么××党！……"

云普叔气急了,恨不得立刻把儿子抓来咬他几口出气。声音愈骂愈大了。云普婶也被他惊醒来:

"半夜三更闹什么呀,老头子?儿子一天辛苦到晚,也应该让他们睡一睡！你看,外边还没有天亮哩!"

"都是你这老猪婆不好,养下这些淘气杂种来!"

"老鬼！你骂谁啊?"

"骂你这偏护懒精的猪婆子!"

"好！老鬼,你发了疯！你恶他们,你把他们一个一个都拿去杀掉好了,何必要这样地来把他们慢慢地磨死呢?要不然,把他们统统都卖掉,免得刺痛了你的眼睛。半夜里,天南地北的吵死!"

云普叔暴躁得发了疯,他觉得老婆近来更加无理地偏护着孩子,丝毫不顾及到家中的生计:

"你这猪婆疯了！你要吃饭吗?你！……"

"好！我是疯了！老鬼,你要吃饭,你可以

detriment of their family interests.

"You're completely crazy. Don't you want to eat? You... "

"What if I am crazy? But you, you sell your own daughter so as to eat; now perhaps you'll want to sell sons! You just give me back my Yingying. Oh, I simply don't want to live any more! Ah... ah... "

Crying and screaming she rushed at Yunpu. The thought of her daughter Yingying made her hate Yunpu so much that she wanted to scratch his eyes out.

"Why bring up Yingying? After all we didn't sell Yingying for my sake alone." Uncle Yunpu turned away from her, and left. But the thought of Yingying brought involuntary tears to his eyes.

"Give me back my Yingying... "

Dawn was breaking in the east. The sons stood there rooted to the ground listening to the quarrel between their parents. Mention of their sister also brought painful tears to their eyes.

The day was again extremely fine. Liqiu nudged Shaopu, and together they walked out carrying their tools. Uncle Yunpu, looking extremely sorrowful, followed them out of the door.

"Ah, ah, ah!... " The mother's voice trailed balefully out of the inner room after them.

The morning breeze swept across the fields and the luscious green rice seedlings rippled like waves. There was a special coolness of morning in the air.

"Where shall we work today?"

"Let's go in the direction of Huajia Dyke."

卖女儿！现在你又可以卖儿子。你还我的英英来！老鬼，我的命也不要了！……啊啊啊！……”

“好泼的家伙，你妈妈的！……”

“老忘八！老贼！你自己没有能力就不要养儿女，养大了来给他们作孽。女的好卖了，男的也要逼死他们，将来只剩了你这老忘八！我的英英！老贼，你找回来！啊啊啊！……”

她连哭带骂地向着云普叔扑来，想起了英英，她恨不得把云普叔一口吞掉。

“妈妈的！英英，英英，又不是单为了我一个！”

云普叔连忙躲开她，想起英英来，眼泪也不由自主地掉下了。

“还我的英英，你这老鬼！啊啊！……”

“…………”

“啊啊啊啊！……”

“…………”

东方发白了。儿子木鸡一般地站着。听见爹爹妈妈提及了妹子，也陪着流下几阵酸痛的眼泪来。

天色又是一样的晴和。立秋偷偷地扯了少普一下，提起锄耙就走。云普叔也带着懊恼伤痛的面容，一步一拖地跟出了大门。

“啊啊啊！……”

晨风在田野中掠过，油绿色的禾苗，掀起了层层的浪涛，人们都感到一阵清晨特有的凉意。

“今天车哪一方呢？”

“妈妈的，到华家堤去！”

V

"Liqiu, you are not pious enough. You'd better not carry it."

"Uncle Yunpu, you carry the canopy, and you, Xiaoer, beat the gong."

"There is no one to play the flute! Old Wang, where is your instrument?"

"Damn it! Nobody's willing to help! We still need three more sedan-bearers."

"Count me as one!"

"I'll be one."

"Me too."

"All right, you three be the sedan-bearers. Everyone must wash his face. Xiaoer, be sure you wash yourself clean. Otherwise the god will feel offended."

"Now sound the gong and start playing the flute."

"Sound the gong, Xiaoer, don't you hear? What's the matter with you, are you deaf?"

"Dong, dong, dong!"

"Wu, li-la, la!"

A group of people carrying the image of Guan Di made for the fields.

For over twenty days there had not been a single trace of clouds. The ponds and streams nearby had all gone dry. The fields were yawning with inch-thick cracks here and there. Most of the rice plants were dry and curled up. If this continued for another three

五

“立秋！你的心不诚，不要你抬！”

“云普叔顶万民伞，小二疤子打锣！”

“吹唢呐的没有，王老大你的唢呐呢？”

“妈妈的！好像是哪一个人的事一样，大家都不肯出力，还差三个轿夫。”

“我来一个。高鼻子大爹！”

“我也来！”

“我也来一个！”

“好了，就是你们三个吧！大家都洗一个脸。小二疤子，着实洗干净些，菩萨见怪！”

“打锣！把唢呐吹起来！”

“打锣呀！小二疤子听见没有？婊子的儿子！”

“当！当！当！……”

“呜咧啦！……”

几十个人蜂拥着关帝爷爷，向田野中飞跑去了。

二十多天没有看见一点云影子，池塘里，河里的水都干透了，田中尽是几寸宽的裂口，禾叶大半已经卷了筒。这样再过三四天，便什么都完了。

or four days everything would be finished.

Guan Di's image had been brought to the village three days before. The villagers had killed an ox and burned a catty and a half of incense for the occasion. But there was still no sign of rain, while more rice plants wilted.

That was why everyone felt there must be a reason for the god's reluctance to send them rain. After a great deal of consultation by those in charge of the prayer for rain, many more prayers and entreaties were sent up accompanied by kneeling and kowtowing, yet none of this produced any effect whatsoever.

"Does this mean everything is finished this year?"

"Don't worry! Let's carry the god out and let his lordship take a look around. See whether he can bear the sorrowful sight of the fields."

"All right, perhaps the god has not seen the condition of the fields. Three years ago when there was a drought, it started to rain only after we took the god out to survey the scene. Yunpu, you go and get a few young people; we also need a gong, a drum and a flute."

"Ah!"

Very quickly the provisional troupe was organized, and following the banners, gong, drum and canopy, the green sedan-chair carrying the image of Guan Di was borne aloft on the shoulders of four stalwart men.

They started from Xindukou and Huajia Dyke, went as far as Hongmiao and made several rounds before they returned. But the sun was still as hot as fire and made the people feel as if they were

关帝爷爷是三天前接来的。杀了一条牛，焚了斤半檀香，还是没有一点雨意。禾苗倒烊倒得更加多了。

所以，大家都觉得菩萨不肯发雨下来，一定是有什么原故。几个主祭的首事集合起来商量了很久，求了无数枝签，叩了千百个头，卦还是不能打顺。

“那么今年不完了吗？”

“高鼻子大爹，不要急！我们且把菩萨抬到外面去跑一路，看他老人家见了这个样子心中忍也不忍？”

“好的！也许菩萨还没有看见田中的情况吧！大前年天干，也是请菩萨到外面去兜了一个圈子才下雨的。云普，你去叫几个小伙子来！还有锣鼓唢呐！”

“啊！”

很快地，便把临时的队伍邀齐了。高鼻子大爹在前面领队，第二排是旗锣鼓伞，菩萨的绿呢大轿跟在后头。

从新渡口华家堤，一直弯到红庙，兜了四五个圈子回来，太阳仍旧是同烈火一样，烫得浑身

being roasted. The ground was so hot one could hardly bear to put his foot down. There seemed to be fire everywhere and the people seemed to be struggling in the flames.

Not a drop of rain appeared after all their efforts. Then Guan Di was taken by the people in Moziwan, the next village. People everywhere were busy carrying it around and praying for rain.

"Oh, Heaven, we've had a year of flood and a year of drought. Now what exactly do you want of us?"

Suddenly the wind shifted and blew from the northeast, whistling and whining above the tree tops. The stars and moon were gone. Many people stood outside looking at the sky.

"There's lightning over in that direction."

"'Lightning in the east; no break in the west.' I doubt if we'll have rain!"

"But that is in the north."

"Good! 'Lightning in the south, opens the fire door; lightning in the north, and the rain will pour!' Tonight there should be some rain. Oh Heaven!..."

"We'll have to depend on the mercy of Heaven."

"Yes. After all, none of us has committed any sins. Why should Heaven wish to see us starve?"

"It's not likely that we will."

The sound of rain pattered on the roof amidst the clamour of human voices. There was a coolness in the air and every drop of rain seemed to fall on happy cheerful hearts.

"This is surely the mercy of Heaven!"

The heavy weight oppressing the hearts of the people was gradu-

发烧。地上简直热得不能落脚。四面八方都是火,人们是在火中颠扑!

雨一点还没有求下来,菩萨反被磨子湾抬去了。处处都忙着抬菩萨求雨哩!

"天老爷呀!一年大水一年干,究竟欲把我们怎么办呢?"

风色陡然变了,由东北方吹来呼呼地响着。没有星光也没有月亮,很多的人都站在屋外看天色。

"那方扯闪子哩!"

"东扯西合,有雨不落。"

"那是北方呀!"

"好了!南扯火门开,北扯有雨来!今夜该有点雨下吧,天哪!……"

"总要求天老爷开恩啦!"

"还不是,我们又都没有做过恶人,天老爷难道真的要将我们饿死?"

"不见得吧!"

大家喧嚷一会之后,屋顶上已有了滴沥的声音,人们只感到一阵凉意。每一滴雨声,都像是打落在开放的心花上。

"这真是天老爷的恩典啦!"

横在人们心中的一块巨石,现在全被雨点溶化了。随即,便是暴风雨的降临!

ally melted to nothing by the rain drops. Then immediately a storm broke out. Loudly rumbling thunder and blinding flashes of lightning lashed out at the world.

The rain lasted only twenty-four hours or so, but it was enough to save the crops. The fields were again replete with water, and the shriveled blades of the rice plants straightened out once more. They swayed and danced in the wind like young maidens in fluttering gowns. The plants were going through their period of most rapid growth. There was a silent prayer on every lip for at least twenty more days of good luck. Then the golden grain would appear and only then could it be considered wealth in hand.

The rain was heaviest in the southwest; there, the sky remained dark and overcast. Dread welled up again in the people's hearts. Too much rain in the southwest made people again apprehensive of flood. The peasants had no peace of mind whatsoever.

The water in the west stream was gradually swelling as it flowed downward. The Dyke Administration only sent a few people to patrol the dykes. There was no need to worry about the west stream as long as there was no added trouble from the south stream. It could just go ahead and rise. One day, two days passed and the water continued to rise. Slowly it became nearly level with the dykes. Uncle Yunpu began to worry like everyone else.

"What! How could the west stream alone rise to such a height!"

All the people started to clamour: "Hurry, we had better do something about it! What happened last year must not happen again."

The bitter experience of the previous year had taught them that

雷跟在闪电的后面发脾气。

大雨只下了一日夜，田中的水又饱满起来。禾苗都得了救，卷了筒子的禾叶边开展了，像少女们解开着胸怀一样地迎风摆动。长，很迅速地在长，这正是禾苗飞长的时间啊！每个人都默祷着：再过二十来天不出乱子，就可以看到粒粒的黄金，那才算是到了手的东西哩。

雨只有西南方上下得特别久，那边的天是乌黑的。恐怖像大江的波浪，前头一个刚刚低落下去，后面的一个又涌上来。西南方上的雨太下大了，又要耽心水患。种田人真是一刻儿也不能安宁啊！

西水渐渐地向下流膨涨，然而很慢。堤局只派了一些人在堤岸上梭巡，光是西水没有南水助势，大家都可不必把它放在心上。让它去高涨吧！

一天，两天，水总是涨着。渐渐地差不多已经平了堤面了，云普叔也跟着大家着起急来：

"怎么！光是西水也有这么大吗？"

人们都同样地嚷着：

"哎哟！大家还是来防备一下吧！千万不要又和去年一样呀！"

去年的苦痛告诉他们，水灾是要及早防备

they must take precautionary measures against flood early. Again the gongs sounded stridently. Crowds upon crowds of people carrying hoes and cotton bedding ran towards the dykes.

"Any one who doesn't come out to work on the dyke deserves to be dragged out and given a good beating," fumed Uncle Yunpu, so busy that he was sweating all over.

"Even the women must come out. If it turns out like last year, none of us will survive... "

"Come, everybody must come and reinforce the dykes!"

Gongs sounded in every village.

In the night, torches and lanterns lit up the dyke, making it look like a long coiling snake. During the day, noisy groups of people gathered here and there in great confusion. The officers from the Security Bureau and their deputies rode around on their horses patrolling the locality. They were, after all, charged with the heavy responsibility of maintaining order. They were afraid that there might be hoodlums mixed up in the crowd — something they must guard against.

"Those low-down dogs! Acting like lords and bullying people! They live on our grain and do nothing but think of ways to harm us. Every single one of them... "

"I feel like tearing them to pieces. One of these days I'm just going to... "

Most of the people who had suffered at the hands of the Security Bureau men cursed silently after letting them by. Even after they had gone quite a distance, Liqiu was still making faces at them behind their backs.

的哟！锣声又响了，一批一批的人都抗着锄头被絮，向堤边跑去！

"哪一个家里有男人不出去来上堤的，他妈妈的拖出来打死！"云普叔忙得满头是汗地说，"连堂客们都不许躲着，妈妈的，今年要再和去年一样，一个也别想活！……"

"大家都挡堤去呀！"

"当！当！当！……"

夜晚上，火把灯笼像长蛇一样地摆在堤上，白天里沿岸都是骚动的人群。团防局里的老爷们，骑着马，带着一群副爷往来的巡视着，他们负有维持治安的重大责任，尤恐这一群人中间，潜伏着有闹事的暴徒分子，这是不能不提防的。

"妈妈的，作威作福的贱狗吃了我们的粮没有事做，日夜打主意来害我们！一个个都安得……"

"我恨不得咬下这些狗入的几块肉！总有一天老子……"

多数被团防加害过的人，让他们走过之后，都咬牙切齿地暗骂着。很远了，立秋还跟在他们的后面装鬼脸儿。

The water was still rising, and at places it had already spilt over the dyke. The yellow muddy water, which more than once had robbed the peasants of their lives, was regarded by them with great fear and dread. They watched the overflowing water with the deepest of hatred and aversion.

"As long as the south stream doesn't rush down, it'll be all right," people tried to comfort each other, as they continued to work with hoes and shovels.

The water stopped spilling over.

Suddenly the stream seemed to flow backwards in a few places. As soon as this was noticed a great commotion spread among the people.

"Where does it start flowing the other way?"

"At the mouth of the Lanxi rivulet!"

"Oh dear! None of us will live through this."

"Oh Heaven, is this the end of us all?"

"Guan Di, if this year is going to be like last year... "

The water in the south stream was swelling. The west stream encountering a heavier flow from the south stream, was unable to accommodate it, and the result was a continuous rise in both streams.

The beating of the gong became more frantic. Peal upon peal, it rent the air, awakening again in people's minds the terror and misery of previous disasters. Even the women and children went to the dyke and helped by piling up earth with their hands. Most of the older people like Uncle Yunpu were already on their knees: "Heaven and the all-forgiving Goddess of Mercy! Please, please,

水仍旧是往上涨,有些已经漂过了堤面。黄黄的水,是曾劫夺过人们的生命的,大家都对它怀着巨大的恐怖。眼睛里都有一把无名的烈火,向这洪水掷投。

“只要南水不再下来就好了!”

人们互相地安慰着。锄头铲耙,还是不住地加工。

水停住了!

突然地,有些地方在倒流,当有人把几处倒流的地方指出来的时候,人群中间,立刻开始了庞大的骚动。

“哪里倒流?”

“兰溪小河口吗?”

“该死!一个也活不成!”

“天啦!你老人家真正要把我们活活地弄死吗?……”

“关帝爷爷呀!今年要再和去年一样……”

南水涨了,西水受着南水的胁迫,立即开始了强烈的反攻,双方冲突的结果,是不断的向上膨涨!

锣声响得紧!人们心中还没有弥缝的创口,又重新地被这痛心的锣锤儿敲得四分五裂,连孩子妇人都跑到堤边去用手捧着一合一合的泥土向堤上堆。老年人和云普叔一道的,多数已经跪下来了:

“天哪!救苦救难的观世音菩萨呀!今年的大水实在再来不得了啊!”

let us not have a flood this year."

"Buddha, if you protect us against this flood, we'll act ten plays in your honour."

"Heaven is punishing us!"

After two days and nights of desperate struggle, everybody's eyes were bloodshot and their bodies felt like flabby cotton wool, they were so tired. The west stream, however, was no longer at the peak of its turbulence, and with the influx of water from the south stream, it flowed backwards and retreated at a long distance. The south stream flowed down and met with no resistance.

The water level dropped.

Thousands of hearts which had been beating apprehensively for days were set at ease. The people opened their mouths and breathed a sigh of relief. Carrying hoes and cotton bedding, the peasants dragged their limp bodies home. Smiles of victory lit up their faces.

"Hey, Cousin Big Lai, come on over this evening. Let's have a little chat." Liqiu said to Big Lai before they parted at the cross-roads.

VI

The burden of life and work weighed down upon the whole village like a heavy yoke. When the rice plants started to flower, all the peasants worked desperately. The people would be saved if they could only last through the next twenty critical days.

Although there was not a single grain of rice at home, Uncle

"盖天古佛！你老人家保过了这场水灾，准还你十本大戏！……"

"天收人啦！"

"……"

经过了两日夜拚命的挣扎，每个人的眼睛里都暴出了红筋。身体像弹熟了的软棉花一样，随处倒落。西水毕竟是过渡了汹涌的时期，经不起南水的一阵反攻，便一泻千里地崩溃下去了！于是南水趁势地顺流下来，一些儿没有阻碍。

水退了！

千万颗悬挂在半空中的心，随着洪水的退落而放下。每个人都张开了口，吐出了一股恶气。提起锄头被絮，拖着软棉花似的身子，各别地踏上了归途。脸上，都挂上着一丝胜利的微笑。

"喂！癞大哥，夜里到我这里来谈天啊！"

立秋在十字路上分岔时对癞老大说。

六

生活和工作，双管齐下地夹攻着这整个的农村。当禾苞标出线来时，差不多每个农民都在拚着他们的性命。过了这严重的一二十天，他们便全能得救！

家中虽然没有一粒米了，然而云普叔的脸

Yunpu was still all smiles. His heart was at ease; after the two false alarms there was ninety per cent certainty of a good harvest. The rice plants were strong and thick, and the flowers seemed sturdy — better than any in the past ten years. To Uncle Yunpu, the world was full of joy and great expectations.

But he did not indulge in excessive day-dreaming. He simply seized upon the present and estimated what it would be like in twenty days or so. Gazing at the green fields, the big sturdy rice plants and the heads of rice about to turn golden, he could scarcely believe his own eyes, and he wondered whether or not he was dreaming. But there they were, the rice plants, actually standing, before his eyes! Real, not imaginary. He was practically intoxicated with happiness.

"Ha, ha, can life this year really be so wonderful?"

Now he would get some results from the fatigue and hard work of the past. From the time they started sowing up until then, Uncle Yunpu actually had not had a moment's leisure. Immediately after the seedlings were planted, there was the drought. Just when they had some rain, there was the threat of flood. Like a pail that went ceaselessly up and down the well, his heart had thumped and had not known any peace or rest. He was as tired as a dead snake. He had not had one decent, satisfying meal in all that time. Even after Yingying was sold the family still ate thin gruel, to say nothing of the days before that when they had had nothing to eat. He could hardly lift his legs when working in the fields and his body had wasted away to practically nothing but skin and bones. Only after all that fear and privation was Uncle Yunpu privileged to see those

上却浮上着满面的笑容。他放心了，经过了这两次巨大的风波，收成已经有了九成把握。禾苗肥大，标线结实，是十多年来所罕见的好，穗子都有那样长了。眼前的世界，所开展在云普叔面前的尽是欢喜，尽是巨大的希望。

然而云普叔并没有作过大的幻想，他抓住了目前的现势来推测二十天以后的情形那是真的。他举目望着这一片油绿色的原野，看看那肥大的禾苗，一线一线快要变成黄金色的穗子，几回都疑是自己的眼睛发昏，自己在做梦。然而穗子禾苗，一件件都是正确地摆在他的面前，他真的欢喜得快要发疯了啊！

"哈哈！今年的世界，真会有这样的好吗？"

过去的疲劳，将开始在这儿作一个总结了：从下种起，一直到现在，云普叔真的没有偷闲过一刻功夫。插田后便闹天干，刚刚下雨又吓大水，一颗心像七上八下的吊桶一般地不能安定。身子疲劳得像一条死蛇，肚皮里没有充过一次饱。以前的挨饿现在不要说，单是英英卖去以后，家中还是吃稀饭的。每次上田，连腿子都提不起，人瘦得像一堆枯骨。一直到现在，经过这许多许多的恐怖和饥饿，云普叔才看见这几线

long ears of rice plants. How could he feel anything but delighted? The crops could now be considered wealth in hand. He must carefully think over what to do with it.

First they must have a few good meals. The children really were too dreadfully starved, poor things. He must arrange to see that they have a few substantial meals to restore their energy. Then a few peculs of rice could be sold, so that they could get a few suits of clothes made. The children were hardly clothed like human beings. They would have a jolly, cheerful mid-autumn festival, pay back all their debts, and save the remainder for the New Year. Of course preparations must be made for the few winter months next year, and then the new....

He must arrange to have both Liqiu and Shaopu betrothed. Indeed, Liqiu showed every sign of being in need of a wife. Let it be the latter part of next year then. He would get both of them married. The year after that there would be grandsons. He'd be a grandfather!

Everything was all right except that Yingying was missing. Uncle Yunpu's heart ached with sorrow. If he had known that the harvest this year was going to be so good, he would not have sold Yingying for anything. Of all his children, Yingying was his favourite, the one who was always so filial and obedient. Now, he himself had sold dear little Yingying to that old man, Xia, whose face was all covered with beard. She was taken away in a little boat, but where to, Uncle Yunpu had not yet been able to find out.

Yingying's fate was indeed pitiful, poor little thing! They had heard nothing about her since she left. The better the year, the

长长的穗子，他怎么不欢喜呢？这才是算得到了手的东西呀，还得仔细地将它盘算一下哩！

开始一定要饱饱地吃它几顿。孩子们实在饿得太可怜了，应当多弄点菜，都给他们吃几餐饱饭，养养精神。然后，卖几担出去，做几件衣服穿穿，孩子们穿得那样不像一个人形。过一个热热闹闹的中秋节。把债统统还清楚。剩下来的留着过年，还要预备过明年的荒月，接新……

立秋少普都要定亲，立秋简直是处处都表示需要堂客了。就是明年下半年吧，给他们每个都收一房亲事，后年就可养孙子，做爷爷了……

一切都有办法，只少了一个英英，这真使云普叔心痛。早知今年的收成有这样好，就是杀了他也不肯将英英卖掉啊！云普叔是最疼英英的人，他这许多儿女中只有英英最好，最能孝顺他。现在，可爱的英英是被他自己卖掉了啦！卖给那个满脸胡须的夏老头子了，是用一只小划子装走的。装到什么地方去了呢？云普叔至今还没有打听到。

英英是太可怜了啊！可怜的英英从此便永远没有了下落。年岁越好，越有饭吃，云普叔越

more food they had, the more sorrowfully would Yunpu think of Yingying. It was all because Yingying had been destined by fate never to have even one decent meal at home. If Yingying had suddenly appeared in front of Uncle Yunpu, he would have taken the poor child to his breast and wept away his sorrow. But it was no longer possible to find Yingying and bring her back. She could never be found again. Only her tiny thin image would remain in Uncle Yunpu's heart, a scar which would never heal.

Except for this one thing, there was nothing but happiness and joy for Uncle Yunpu. Everything was fine. He told his sons repeatedly that they must not mention Yingying's name. They must not prick his heart and reopen the old wound.

There was no more rice in the house, but Uncle Yunpu was not worried in the least, because he already had a way out. In a couple of days they would be able to really eat. With what he had to show in the field, he was not afraid that people would refuse to lend him a little grain.

Mr. He tried desperately to get people to borrow his grain. He was ready to send eight or ten piculs to anyone and not at such a high price either — only six dollars per picul. Mr. Li also had grain for loan at six dollars per picul and without interest. It was pretty good grain, too.

The people in the village had to eat. They had to try to tide over the next fortnight or so somehow. But no one wanted to borrow grain from Mr. He or Mr. Li. It would be a great pity to do so, because one pecul borrowed now would mean three piculs to be returned in less than a fortnight.

加伤心。英英难道就没有坐在家中吃一顿饱饭的福命吗？假如现在英英还能站在云普叔面前的话，他真的想抱住这可怜的孩子嚎啕大哭一阵！天呵！然而可怜的英英是找不回来了，永远地找不回来了！留在云普叔心中的，只有那条可怜的瘦小的影子，永远不可治疗的创痛！

还有什么呢？除此以外，云普叔的心中只是快乐的，欢喜的，一切都有了办法。他再三地嘱咐儿子，不许谁再提及那可怜的英英，不许再刺痛他的心坎！

家里没有米了，云普叔丝毫也没有着急，因为他已经有了办法，再过十多天就能够饱饱地吃几餐。有了实在的东西给人家看了，差了几粒吃饭谷还怕没有人发借吗？

何八爷家中的谷子，现在是拚命地欲找人发借。只怕你不开口，十担八担，他可以派人送到你的家中来。价钱也没有那样昂贵了，每担只要六块钱。

李三爹的家里也有谷子发借。每担六元，并无利息，而且都是上好的东西。

垄上的人都要吃饭，都要渡过这十几天难关，可是谁也不愿意去向八爷或三爹借谷子。实在吃得心痛，现在借来一担，过不了十多天，要还他们三担。

It was better to tighten one's belt and get over this fortnight or so without borrowing.

"It's all the doings of landlords! They live by exploiting us. When we were practically starving, they wouldn't lend us a bit of grain even though we kowtowed to them. Now, when the crops in the fields are a certainty, they look all over the place for people to lend their stuff to. For something over ten days they want three piculs for every picul borrowed. If these dogs don't die an early, painful death, Heaven has no eyes..."

"Uncle Big Nose, didn't you borrow grain from him too? Yes, Heaven has no eyes. The more wicked these people, the more prosperous they are."

"You're right! Heaven will not punish them. If we wish to get them punished, we must depend on ourselves to do it."

"How do we depend on ourselves? When you say that, Liqiu, you must have something up your sleeve. Come, tell us what's on your mind."

"I've nothing up my sleeve. But my way of thinking is like this. The grain we reap from the harvest, we'll eat ourselves; we won't let these parasites have one grain of rent. Nor will we pay back what we borrowed. Really, what right do they have to demand things of us?"

"That's child's talk. After all, the land belongs to them," Er Lai Zi said grandiosely, as if lecturing him.

"Belong to them? Why don't they cultivate their own land then? What sort of land would it be if other people didn't cultivate it for

还是硬着肚皮来挨过这十几天吧！

“这就是他们这班狗杂种的手段啦！他们妈妈的完全盘剥我们过生活。大家要饿死的时候，向他们叩头也借不着一粒谷子，等到田中的东西有把握了，这才拚命地找人发借。只有十多天，借一担要还他们三担。这班狗杂种不死，天也真正没有眼睛。……”

“高鼻子大爹，你不是也借过他的谷子吗？哼！天才没有眼睛哩！越是这种人越会发财享福！”

“是的呀！天是不会去责罚他们的，要责罚他们这班杂种，还得依靠我们自己来！”

“怎样靠自己呢？立秋，你这话里倒有些玩艺儿，说出来大家听听看！”

“什么玩艺儿不玩艺儿，我的道理就在这里：自己收的谷子自己吃，不要纳给他们这些狗杂种的什么捞什子租，借了也不要给他们还去！那时候，他还有什么道理来向我们要呢？”

“小孩子话！田是他家的呀！”二癞子装着教训他的神气。

“他家的？他为什么有田不自己种呢？他的田是哪里来的？还不是大家替他做出来的

them? Er Lai Zi, you are so dumb! Do you really think the land is theirs?"

"Then whose land is it?"

"Yours and mine. The land belongs to whoever tills it."

"Ha, ha, Liqiu, this is the kind of thing they said when there was the Peasants' Association in 1926-1927. You fool, ha, ha..."

"What are you laughing at, Uncle Big Nose? Are you saying the Peasants' Association was no good?"

"It was good, but they'll chop your head off for saying so. Aren't you scared?"

"What is there to be scared of? As long as we are united and work together, we are stronger than they. Don't you know how it is in Jiangxi Province?"①

"'Unite and work together' — what you say is right. But... ha..."

After chatting a while, Uncle Big Nose, Er Lai Zi and everyone else all agreed that what Liqiu had said was correct. The Peasants' Association formed in 1927 was really good, except that it had not lasted long. And besides, many people had suffered because of it. If there were to be another such association, it should be permanent. It ought to be made to last.

"Well, Liqiu, and what about the guns in the Security Bureau?"

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① Referring to the revolutionary base in Jiangxi Province, where, under the Workers' and Peasants' Government, the peasants rose against the landlords and distributed the land.

吗？二癞子你真蠢啊！你以为这些田真是他的吗？”

“那么，是哪个的呢？”

“你的，我的！谁种了就是谁的！”

“哈哈！立秋！你这完全是十五六年时农民会上的那种说法。你这孩子，哈哈！”

“高鼻子大爹，笑什么？农民会你说不好吗？”

“好，杀你的头！你怕不怕？”

“怕什么啊！只要大家肯齐心，你没有看见江西吗？”

“齐心！你这话是很有道理的，不过，哈哈！……”

高鼻子大爹，还有二癞子、壳壳头、王老六大家和立秋瞎说一阵之后，都相信了立秋的话儿不错。民国十六年的农民会的确是好的；就可惜没有弄得长久，而且还有许多人吃了亏。假如要是再来一个的话，一定硬要把它弄得久长一些啊！

“好！立秋，还有团防局里的枪炮呢？”

"Pooh, when the time came, couldn't we disarm them?"

Since his eldest son was away from home all day, Uncle Yunpu had to attend to everything himself. There was no more rice in the house, and he had to go over to Mr. Li's to borrow a picul. "You have five or six to feed in your family! Will one picul be enough? Why not take a couple of piculs more?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Li."

In the end Uncle Yunpu took only one picul. When they needed fat and salt, they could now get them from the store on credit. Tian, the butcher, his face wreathed in smiles, often asked with hypocritical concern, "Brother Yunpu, would you like some meat for your table?"

"Oh, no! We are a long way from eating meat."

"Never mind, you just come and get some any time!"

From then on Uncle Yunpu began to feel that he was getting to be quite a big man. Whoever he met in the street would nod and greet him with a smile. At home things had also begun to improve. There was one thing, however, which marred his happiness; his eldest son had turned out to be such a disappointment. He was never around when there was any work to be done, and Uncle Yunpu had to take care of everything himself. Dashed were all his hopes of enjoying a leisurely old age.

The heads of rice t[illegible] more golden day by day; the smile on Uncle Yunpu's face broadened. He was ever so busy. He mended the winnowing-machine and also the mat for sunning the grain. Then he asked one neighbour to help with threshing, and another

“咄！到了那个时候，我们就不好把他妈妈的缴下来吗？”

儿子整天地不在家里，一切都要云普叔自己去理会。家中没有米了，不得不跑到李三爹那里去借了一担谷子来。

“你家里五六个人吃茶饭，一担谷就够了吗？多挑两担去！”

“多谢三爹！”

云普叔到底只借了一担。他知道，多吃一担，过不了十来天就要还三担多。没有油盐吃，曹炳生店里也可以赊账了。肉店里的田麻拐，时常装着满面笑容地来慰问他：

“云普哥，你要吃肉吗？”

“不要啊，吃肉还早哩。”

“不要紧的，你只管拿去好了！”

云普叔从此便觉得自己已经在渐渐地伟大，无论什么人遇见了他，都要对他点头微笑地打个招呼。家中也渐渐地有些生气了。就只恨自己的儿子不争气，什么事都要自己操心。妈妈的，老太爷就真的没有福命做吗？

穗子一天一天地黄起来，云普叔脸上的笑容也一天一天地加厚着。他真是忙碌啊！补晒簟，修风车，请这个来打禾，邀那个来扎草，一天

to help bind the straw. He was busy from morning till night, but always smiling. This year, his life was really three times better than that of ordinary years. He could expect to reap at least thirty-four to thirty-five piculs of grain per picul of seed. This certainly was a good year for the poor.

The year before, all because the dykes had not been maintained in good repair, there had been a flood. This year it was very important to repair the dyke, and make it one foot thicker. Then there would be no need to worry about flood. This was of course the responsibility of the peasants. Men from the Dyke Administration had already long ago come and reminded them of it.

"Cao Yunpu, you must pay 8.58 dollars for the repair of the dykes."

"Of course we must pay up. It's little more than a picul of grain. I'll bring it to the Administration myself after the harvest. Thanks for coming. It's our duty to pay..." Yunpu replied, smiling. Unless the dykes were repaired, it would not be possible to prevent a flood next year.

The *Jia zhang*[①] also came to contact Uncle Yunpu in the name of the director of the Security Bureau. "Uncle Yunpu, you pay 8.40 dollars security tax this year. The Bureau has already sent down a notice."

"Why so much, Chief?"

"We're collecting for two years. Did you pay last year?"

"Oh! Last year! All right, I'll send it over by and by."

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① Head of ten households under the Kuomintang regime.

到晚，他都是忙得笑迷迷的。今年的世界确比往年要好上三倍，一担田，至少可以收三十四五担谷。这真是穷苦人走好运的年头啊！

去年遭水灾，就因为是堤修得不好，今年首先最要紧的是修堤。再加厚它一尺土吧，那就什么大水都可以不必担心事了。这是种田人应尽的义务呀！堤局里的委员早已来催促过。

“曹云普，你今年要出八块五角八分的堤费啦！”

“这是应该的，一石多点谷！打禾后我亲自送到局里来！劳了委员先生的驾。应该的，应该的！……”

云普叔满面笑容地回答着。堤不修好，免不了第二年又要遭水灾。

保甲先生也衔了团防局长的使命，来和云普叔打招呼了：

“云普叔，你今年缴八块四角钱的团防捐税啦！局里已经来了公事。”

“怎么有这样多呢？甲老爷！”

“两年一道收的！去年你缴没有缴过？”

“啊！我慢慢地给你送来。”

"There's also a patriotic tax of 5.72, and an anti-communist tax of 3.07 dollars."

"Oh! And what are these taxes for, Chief?"

"Bah, old man, you're so old you're quite muddle-headed. Are you still in the dark at a time when the Japanese have already reached Peking? The money will be used to buy arms to save the country and to fight the communist bandits, stupid!"

"I know, I know... I — I'll send it over."

Uncle Yunpu was not worried, was not going to let such petty sums of money bother him. He would reap a huge harvest and in four or five days his pockets would be lined with gold. What was there for him to worry about?

VII

Yunpu now felt that his disobedient eldest son was his one great disappointment in life. Whenever work reached a critical stage, Liqiu was always absent from home. This made Uncle Yunpu so mad that he would pace the room in fury. He could never find out what his son did outside. The lad would go out early in the morning and would not come back even by midnight. The sound of threshing had begun all around them and their grain was already so ripe and golden that it would fall off by itself unless it was reaped soon. "That dog, away from home all day. He doesn't care how urgent the work is at home."

Now he was forced to go out and hire a team of harvesters. He cursed roundly as he walked towards the main dyke. The sun was

“还有救国捐五元七角二，剿共捐三元零七。”

“这！又是什么名目呢？甲，甲老爷！”

“咄！你这老头子真是老糊涂了！东洋鬼子打到北京来了，你还在鼓里困。这钱是拿去买枪炮来救国打共匪的呀！”

“啊呀！……晓得，晓得了！我，我，我送来。”

云普叔并不着急，光是这几块钱，他真不放在心上。他有巨大的收获，再过四五天的世界尽是黄金，他还有什么要着急的呢？

七

儿子不听自己的指挥，是云普叔终身的恨事。越是功夫紧的当口，立秋总不在家，云普叔暴躁得满屋乱跑。他始终不知道儿子在外面干些什么勾当。大清早跑出去，夜晚三更还不回来。四方都有桶响了，自家的谷子早已黄熟得滚滚的，再不打下来，就会一粒粒地自行掉落。

“这个狗养的，整天地在外面收尸！他也不管家中是在什么当口上了。妈妈的！”

他一面恨恨地骂着，一面走到大堤上去想

just right. It would indeed be a pity not to get the grain reaped and threshed. Ordinarily, when Liqiu was home, the father and sons could have managed as a three-man harvesting team. But with Liqiu away, Uncle Yunpu had to go to the dyke and hire professional harvesters who came from outside the locality.

Most of these harvesters came from Xiangxiang and around there. Carrying their simple baggage, they would usually come in teams of four at the beginning of autumn. They would roam around the counties bordering the lake, specializing in reaping and threshing rice for the local people. Their wages were not excessive, but it was customary to feed them fairly well.

Very quickly, Uncle Yunpu hired a team. Four strong men with shabby baggage on their shoulders followed him back. By the time they had started to work the sun was already quite high. Uncle Yunpu told Shaopu to stay in the field and supervise the hired men while he himself went around to look for Liqiu.

It was getting dark and the grain from an area planted with twenty catties of seeds had been harvested. He had to pay four strings of money as wages. And still Liqiu was nowhere to be found. It made Uncle Yunpu quite beside himself with rage. The harvest, though, was unexpectedly bountiful — twelve piculs of rough grain were reaped from twenty catties of seeds. His happiness was spoiled only by his irritation with his son, who was such a disappointment.

It really was not worthwhile hiring a team to work. Besides the wages, the harvesters devoured bowls and bowls of luscious white rice, and the thought of it all made Yunpu's heart sink. When he

兜一张桶[1]。无论如何,今天的日脚好,不响桶是非常可惜的事情。本来,立秋在家,父子三个人还可勉强地支持一张跛脚桶[2],立秋不回来就只好跑到大堤上去叫外帮打禾客。

打禾客大半是由湘乡那方面来的,每年的秋初总有一批这样的人来:挑着简单的两件行李,四个一伴四个一伴地向这滨湖的几县穿来穿去,专门替人家打禾割稻子,工钱并不十分大,但是要吃一点儿较好的东西。

云普叔很快地叫了一张桶。四个彪形大汉,肩着憔悴的行囊跟着他回来了。响桶时太阳已经出了两丈多高,云普叔叫少普守在田中和打禾客作伴,自己到处去寻找立秋。

天晚了,两斗田已经打完,平白地花了四串打禾工钱。立秋还是没有寻到,云普叔更焦急得无可如何了。收成是出于意外的丰富,两斗田竟能打到十二担多毛谷子。除了恼恨儿子不争气以外,自己的心中倒是非常快活的。

叫一张外帮桶真是太划不来的事情啊!工钱在外,一大碗一大碗的白米饭,都给这些打禾

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① 桶:即打禾桶,四方的,很大。四个人支持一张桶,两人割稻,两人打稻。"兜一张桶",就是说叫四个打稻的人来。——原注。

② 跛脚桶:即不够四个人,像跛脚的意思。——原注。

remembered how in the past they themselves had faced starvation he was ready to grab Liqiu by the neck and choke him to death. They certainly must not hire harvesters again. Even if he were to depend only on Shaopu and himself, he could still manage to get the grain harvested from an area planted with a few catties of seeds at least.

It was getting quite late. Uncle Yunpu was finding it hard to fall asleep. Faintly and indistinctly he heard Liqiu outside whispering to someone. Anger again took possession of him. Opening his eyes he shouted: "You wastrel! You nighthawk! So you still dare to come back! You neglect everything at home, leaving me, an old man, to struggle along alone. I don't care to live any longer! Today it's either your life or mine! See what you can do against an old grey head!" So saying, he snatched up a wooden stick, and dashed at his son in fury. Behind the swing of the stick lay the power of all his resentment at the loss of four strings of money and the precious white rice consumed by the harvesters.

"Uncle Yunpu, please don't hold it against him. This time it's really because we asked him to help us with some business."

"What sort of business? And what business have you taking him away from his work? You, who are you... Cousin Big Lai, don't you know how heavy our work is these days? And he, the scoundrel, just went off like that!" He was really beside himself with fury, and the stick trembled violently in his hand.

"You're right of course, Uncle Yunpu, but this time he was really helping us in some very important matter..." put in another, in an attempt to placate the old man.

客吃进肚里去了，真使云普叔看得眼红。想起过去饥饿的情形来，恨不得把立秋抓来活活地摔死。明天万万不能再叫打禾客了，自己动手，和少普两个人，一天至少能打几升斗把田。

夜深了，云普叔还是不能入梦。仿佛听到了立秋在耳边头和人家说话。张开眼睛一看，心中立刻冒出火来：

"你这杂种！你，你也要回来呀！妈妈的，家中的事情你一点都不管，剩下我这个老鬼来一个人拚命！妈妈的，我的命也不想要了！今朝不是鱼死就是网破！老子一定要看看你这杂种的本事！……"

云普叔顺手拿着一条木棍，向立秋不顾性命地扑来。四串工钱和那些白米饭的恶气，现在统统要在这儿发作了。

"云普叔叔，请你老人家不要错怪了他，这一次真是我们请他去帮忙一件事情去了！"

"什么鸡巴事？你、你、你是谁？……癞大哥你难道不知道吗？我家中的功夫这样忙！他妈妈的，他要去收尸！"云普叔气急了，手中的木棍儿不住地战动。

"不错呀！云普伯伯。这回他的确是替我们有事情去了啊！……"又一个说。

"So you people connive with him to make me suffer! The chicken knows nothing of the troubles of the duck; do you people understand our affairs? You..."

"Yes, Uncle, but he is back now, and tomorrow he'll help you in the fields."

"Work in the fields!" Liqiu said indignantly. "We'll work ourselves into the grave, but we won't even get a square meal for it, while those parasites get everything ready-made. Just you wait and see. We work our fingers to the bone, but will we get anything out of it? I made up my mind long ago."

"Who's going to rob you of it, you swine?"

"There are plenty of people who'll rob us. Our bit of grain won't even be enough to go round. We can go on working like this for some eight or ten years, and still we won't have anything to show for it."

"You swine, you're just lazy, and can only talk rubbish. Since you don't want to work for a living, do you think food will drop from heaven for you to eat? You dare to argue with me!"

Once again Uncle Yunpu swung his stick, ready to smash the head of his unfilial son.

"Now, now, Liqiu, you mustn't argue any more," put in one of the men. "Old Uncle, why don't you go and get some rest? But it's true, the world is no longer what it used to be. The peasants simply can't hold up their heads. All their lives they work the year round, but whatever they reap is sent off to others picul after picul. Taxes, levies, payment for this and payment for that — what is left for themselves? To make matters worse, the market

"好！你们这班人都帮着他来害我。鸡肚里不晓得鸭肚里的事！你们都知道我的家境吗？你们？……"

"是的，伯伯！他现在已经回来了，明天就可以帮助你老人家下田！"

"下田！做死了也捞不到自己一顿饱饭，什么都是给那些杂种得现成。你看，我们做个要死，能够落得一粒捞什子到手吗？我老早就打好了算盘！"立秋愤愤地说。

"谁来抢去了你的，猪杂种？"

"要抢的人才多呢！这几粒捞什子终究会不够分配的！再做十年八年也别想落得一颗！"

"猪入的！你这懒精偏有这许多辩说，你不做事情天上落下来给你吃！你和老子对嘴！"

云普叔重新地把木棍提起，恨不得一棍子下来，将这不孝的东西打杀！

"好了，立秋，不许你再多说！老伯伯，你老人家也休息一会儿！本来，现在的世界也变了，作田的人真是一辈子也别想抬起头来。一年忙到头，收拾下来，一担一担送给人家去！捐呀！债呀！饷呀！……哪里分得自己还有捞呢？而

price of grain has been dropping steadily. Unless we think of a way out, we'll be up against it again. That's why we..."

"Nonsense! All my life, I've thought of only one thing — work. All I know is, we must work. Otherwise there will be nothing to eat..."

"Yes... Liqiu, you pay attention to what your Dad says. We'll see you again."

After the young people had gone, Liqiu went to sleep with his clothes on. But Uncle Yunpu's mind was uneasy, as if an entirely new and strange burden were weighing on it.

The day after Liqiu's return, the grain was carried back from the fields picul after picul. Fat and yellow, it really resembled gold.

There was not a single person in the village who did not rejoice. This year's harvest was at least three times better than that of ordinary years. No wonder people smiled and laughed. After all, this rich harvest was the result of struggling on empty stomachs, of toiling day and night under great stress and worry over a series of calamities.

When people met one another, they smiled and nodded. They commented on the fact that Heaven, after all, was not blind, and would not let the poor people starve. They talked about their past sufferings: flood, drought, hard work, fear and the pangs of a hungry stomach... but now everything was going to be all right.

The market gradually began to show changes, too, but of a less auspicious nature. Commodity prices rose over one hundred per cent within two or three days. On the other hand, the price of rice dropped alarmingly day by day. Six dollars, four dollars, three

且市面的谷价这几天真是一落千丈，我们不想个法子是不可能的啊！所以我们……"

"妈妈的！老子一辈子没有想过什么鸡巴法子，只知道要做，不做就没有吃的……"

"是呀！……立秋你好好地服侍你的爹爹，我们再见！"

三四个后生子走后，立秋随即和衣睡下。云普叔的心中，像卡着一块硬硼硼的石子。

从立秋回来的第二天起，谷子一担一担地由田中挑回来，壮壮的，黄黄的，真像金子。

这垄上，没有一个人不欢喜的。今年的收成比往年至少要好上三倍。几次惊恐，日夜疲劳，空着肚皮挣扎出来的代价，能有这样丰满，谁个不喜笑颜开呢？

人们见着面都互相点头微笑着，都会说天老爷有眼睛，毕竟不能让穷人一个个都饿死。他们互相谈到过去的苦况：水，旱，忙碌和惊恐，以及饿肚皮的难堪！……现在他们全都好了啦。

市面也渐渐地热闹了，物价只在两三天功夫中，高涨到一倍以上。相反地，谷米的价格倒一天一天地低落下来。

六块！四块！三块！一直低落到只有一元五角的市价了，还是最上等的迟谷。

dollars... it dropped until it was only 1.50 dollars for the best quality, late crop rice.

"How can it drop like that?"

With the drop in the price of grain, the hopes and joys of but a few days before gradually died down. People's hearts tightened with each drop in price. Furthermore, the rise in commodity prices made life for the peasants, in this year of bumper harvest, just as hard as in ordinary years, if not more so. This grain, the fruit of their hard struggle, gained at the cost of their sweat and blood — who would be willing to sell it at such a low price?

When Uncle Yunpu first heard the news, he was not very much alarmed. His eyes were already dazed by the golden grain, and he did not believe that such wonderful life-saving treasure would not sell for a good price. When Liqiu told him that the price of rice was dropping fast, he remained undaunted. His eyes staring with anger, he shouted, "It's only you bunch of ne'er-do-wells creating alarm by spreading rumours. Only a drop in the price of rice! What is there to get excited about? If nobody wants to pay a good price for rice, can't we keep it and eat it ourselves? If they don't want it, let them all starve."

However, it's one thing to give vent to one's feelings, and quite another to stop the drop in the price of rice. Uncle Yunpu could do nothing about the latter. The news that the late crop was priced at 1.20 dollars per picul gradually spread throughout the vast countryside.

"One dollar twenty cents! Only a fool would sell at that price."

"当真跌得这样快吗?"

欢欣、庆幸的气氛,于是随着谷价的低落而渐渐地消沉下来了。谷价跌下一元,每个人的心中都要紧一把。更加以百物的昂贵,丰收简直比常年还要来得窘困些了。费了千辛万苦挣扎出来的血汗似的谷子,谁愿那样不值钱地将它卖掉呢?

云普叔初听到这样的风声,并没有十分惊愕,他的眼睛已经看黄黄的谷子看昏了。他就不相信这样好好的救命之宝会卖不起钱。当立秋告诉他谷价疯狂地暴跌的时候,他还瞪着两只昏黄的眼睛怒骂道:

"就是你们这班狗牛养的东西在大惊小怪地造谣!谷跌价有什么希奇呢?没有出大价钱的人,自己不好留着吃?妈妈的,让他们都饿死好了!"

然而,寻着儿子发气是发气,谷价低,还是没有法子制止。一块二角钱一担迟谷的声浪,渐渐地传播了这广大的农村。

"一块二角,婊子的儿子才肯卖!"

Even if the price of rice had dropped, even if the grain was not worth a cent, Uncle Yunpu still urged his sons to work hard. After the crop was threshed, the straw had to be dried and the grain spread out under the sun. It then went through the winnowing-machine and was stored in the barn. They toiled ceaselessly all day under the burning sun, so that eventually the moist, dirty, rough grain became sturdy, clean, golden grain. He kept assuring himself that if necessary, he would keep this precious life-saving treasure as food in the house for the next three years, rather than sell it at such a low price. The grain was, after all, the fruit of his sweat and labour over the past six months.

The fields after the autumn harvest resembled the devastation following a battle. Everything was topsyturvy, nothing was in order. The whole countryside seemed to have settled down temporarily — settled down to waiting expectantly for an impending wave which would destroy it.

VIII

Liqiu, the eldest son, was unalterably opposed to inviting the landlords to dinner to discuss the rent. He stamped out of the house in disgust. Uncle Yunpu, although he felt upset about it, nevertheless continued to make preparations for the dinner with great care. He believed that at the dinner he would beyond a doubt get a little pity and sympathy from them. He was old, and in the eyes of his creditors, his age would perhaps get some consideration.

无论谷价低落到一钱不值，云普叔仍旧是要督促儿子们工作的。打禾后晒草，晒谷，上风车，进仓，在火烈的太阳底下，终日不停地劳动着。由水泱泱地杂着泥巴乱草的毛谷，一变而为干净黄壮的好谷子了。他自己认真地决定着：这样可爱的救命宝，宁愿留在家中吃它三五年，决不肯烂便宜地将它卖去。这原是自己大半年来的血汗呀！

秋收后的田野，像大战过后的废垒残墟一样，凌乱的没有一点次序。整个的农村，算是暂时地安定了。安定在那儿等着，等着，等着某一个巨大的浪潮来毁灭它！

八

为着几次坚决的反对办"打租饭"，大儿子立秋又赌气地跑出了家门。云普叔除了怄气之外，仍旧是恭恭敬敬地安排着。无论如何，他可以相信在这一次"打租"的筵席上，多少总可以博得爷们一点同情的怜悯心。他老了，年老的人，在爷们的眼睛里，至少总还可以讨得一些便宜吧！

A chicken, a duck and two bowls of fat pork! The dinner was so good that Uncle Yunpu himself found his mouth watering. He changed into a neatly patched suit of clothes and made Shaopu sweep the front room clean. The sun had not yet reached the middle of the sky.

Earlier in the morning, Uncle Yunpu had been to Mr. He's and Mr. Li's house. After he had tendered his verbal invitation with as great ceremony as he could master, both Mr. Li and Mr. He promised to come. Director Chen of the Dyke Administration was also invited and Mr. He promised to bring along enough people to fill the table.

The table was already laid, but the guests had not yet arrived. Uncle Yunpu stood by the door and peered around expectantly for a while. In the distance he seemed to see two lines of dark shadows moving in their direction. He quickly rushed inside and told Shaopu and Sixi to stay in the back room. They must not stand around outside and irritate the guests. Once more he wiped the four benches and made sure that everything was tidy. Then he stood by the door and awaited the arrival of his guests.

There were seven altogether. Besides Messrs. He and Li and Director Chen, the two landlords each brought his bookkeeper. There were also two strangers, one with a beard who looked like a Buddha, and another, a handsome young gentleman.

"Yunpu, you really shouldn't have gone to so much trouble!" said Mr. Li, squinting through small beady eyes like a mouse, his sparse whiskers straggling.

"Not at all, not at all. This is not half good enough. I hope you

一只鸡,一只鸭子,两碗肥肥的猪肉,把云普叔馋得拖出一线一线的唾沫来。进内换了一身补得规规矩矩的衣裤,又吩咐少普将大堂扫得清清爽爽了,太阳还没有当空。

早晨云普叔到过何八爷家里,又到过李三爹庄上;诚恳地说明了他的敬意之后,八爷三爹都答应来吃他们一餐饭,堤局里的陈局长也在内,何八爷准许了替云普叔邀满一桌人。

桌上的杯筷已经摆好了,爷们还没有到。云普叔又恭恭敬敬地站在大门口观望了一回,远远地似乎有两行黑影向这方移动了。连忙跑进来,吩咐少普和四喜儿暂时躲到后面去,不要站在外面碍了爷们的眼。四条长凳子,重新地将它们揩了一阵,自己觉得没有什么不干净的地方了,才安心地站在门边侍候爷们的驾到。

一路总共七个人,除了三爹八爷和陈局长以外,各人还带了一位算租谷的先生。其他的两位不认识,一个有兜腮胡须的像菩萨,一位漂漂亮亮的后生子。

"云普!你费了力呀!"满面花白胡子,眼睛像老鼠的三爹说。

"实在没有什么,不恭敬得很!只好请三

will excuse such an ordinary meal. I'm too old now, really, to do very much." Yunpu replied with utmost humility, his body huddled into a small knot and his tone stressing the word "old." His face was shrouded in a forced, unnatural smile.

"We told you not to go to any trouble, but you insisted! Ha, ha!" Mr. He laughed, revealing bloodless lips and uneven, yellow teeth.

"Oh, Mr. He, this is nothing! It's just to show a tenant's gratitude. Mr. He must pardon any slips..."

"Ha! Ha!"

Director Chen followed with a few added formalities. Then Shaopu started to bring out the food.

"Please help yourselves!"

The chopsticks and spoons sank into the food and it was swept up as in a hurricane. Uncle Yunpu and Shaopu, who acted as waiters, stood by respectfully, on either side, their eyes fixed on the delicacies spread out.

Their mouths watered, and they had to swallow hard, as they watched the guests chew up large pieces of fat pork with great relish. At length Shaopu almost broke down in tears, he was so overcome by an intense craving for just one little taste. If Uncle Yunpu had not been around, he would have gone to the table and snatched up a piece of meat for himself.

For half an hour they stood watching excitedly as if on a battlefield. Then all was over. The guests had finished their meal. Shaopu cleared the table and went off to make tea. The guests walked around a bit, and then gathered around the table again.

爹，八爷，陈老爷原谅原谅！唉！老了，实在对不住各位爷们！"

云普叔战战兢兢地回答着，身子几乎缩成了一团。"老了"两个字说得特别的响。接着便是满脸的苦笑。

"我们叫你不要来这些客气，你偏要来，哈哈！"何八爷张开着没有血色的口，牙齿上堆满了大粪。

"八爷，你老人家……唉！这还说得上客气吗？不过是聊表佃户们一点孝心而已！一切还是要请八爷的海量包涵！"

"哈哈！"

陈局长也跟着说了几句勉励劝慰的话，少普才从后面把菜一碗一碗地捧出来。

"请呀！"

筷子羹匙，开始便像狼吞虎咽一样。云普叔和少普二人分立在左右两旁侍候，眼睛都注视着桌上的菜肴。当肥肥的一块肉被爷们吞嚼得津津有味时，他们的喉咙里像有无数只蚂蚁在那里爬进爬出。涎水从口角里流了出来，又强迫把它吞进去。最后少普简直馋得流出来眼泪了，要不是有云普叔在他旁边，他真想跑上去抢一块来吃吃。

像上战场一般地挨过了半点钟，爷们都吃饱了。少普忙着泡茶搬桌子，爷们都闲散地走动着。五分钟后，又重新地围坐拢来。

With bowed head, Uncle Yunpu stood by the door, waiting respectfully for the guests to begin the conversation.

"Well, Yunpu, now the meal is over, what is it you want to say? You can tell us now."

"Mr. He, Mr. Li and Mr. Chen, I'm sure you must know about all my difficulties. Yunpu can only beg of you..."

"But this year's harvest is good."

"That's true, Mr. He. Yes, it is."

"Then what is it you want to say?"

"I — I want to beg of you..."

"Well, go ahead and say it."

"Honestly, it was very hard for us last year, and for the time being we still suffer from it. My family, both old and young, must eat everyday. I have no way of making money, but must depend on what I get from the land. I would like to ask Mr. He and Mr. Li..."

"And what is your wish?"

"I can only ask Mr. He to be lenient and cut down on the rent just a little. And I beseech Mr. He to be kind and merciful in regard to the seed grain and beans I borrowed this year and last... and Mr. Li, I beg you..."

"Oh, I see. Now I fully understand what you mean. You only want us to collect a smaller amount of grain from you, is that it? But Yunpu, you should also realize that last year everybody suffered from the flood. Perhaps it was harder for us than for you, and therefore it is harder for us to get over it. Our expenses are at least thirty times greater than yours, but who will earn extra money for

云普叔垂着头，靠着门框边站着，恭恭敬敬地听候爷们说话。

“云普，饭也吃过了，你有什么话，现在尽管向我们说呀！”

“三爹，八爷，陈老爷都在这里，难道你们还不明白云普的困难吗？总得求求爷们……”

“今年的收成不差呀！”

“是的，八爷！”

“那么，你打算要说些什么呢？”

“我想，想求求爷们！……”

“啊！你说。”

“实在是云普去年的元气伤狠了，一时恢复不起来。满门大小天天要吃这些，云普又没有力量赚活钱，呆板地靠田中过日子。总得要求八爷，三爹……”

“你的打算呢？”

“总求八爷高抬贵手，在租谷项下，减低一两分。去年借的豆子和今年种谷项下，也要请八爷格外开恩！……三爹，你老人家也……”

“好了，你的意思我统统明白了，无非是要我们少收你几粒谷。可是云普，你也应当知道呀！去年、去年谁没有遭水灾呢？我们的元气说不定还要比你损伤得厉害些呢！我们的开销至少要比你大上三十倍，有谁来替我们赚进一

us? We have to depend on the grain we get from rent... As for the beans I loaned you last year, it's hardly right for you to ask me to be merciful now, because those beans actually saved your lives. Wasn't I merciful to have made you the loan in the first place? Do you have the face to say you're not willing to pay back the debt?"

"It isn't that I don't want to pay back the debt. But I beg Mr. He to please be lenient on the interest... "

"I know, I know. I certainly can't permit you to suffer in any way. But you were not the only person who borrowed beans. If I let you pay less, other people would also want to pay less, and that would never do. As for the seed grain, that certainly is not my business. I was only handling it. It belonged to the county granary, so how can I make a decision about that?... "

"Yes, of course, I know how it is, Mr. He. But Yunpu is getting old. This time I only ask Mr. He and Mr. Li to be specially charitable. If the harvest is good next year, I certainly will not hold back anything. This time everything depends on your mercy."

Yunpu's face wore an extremely pathetic expression, and a sob rattled in his throat as he talked. Whatever happened, he had to plead and beg and get all he could then and there. At the very least, he had to beg to be left with enough to feed and clothe his family for the rest of the year.

"No, nothing doing. In ordinary years, I might be a little lenient, but this year, I simply can't. If evreyone were going to be as troublesome as you, what would happen? Besides, I haven't the time to bother with them all. Still, I am sorry for you. I cannot let you suffer. How much will you have left in your hands after paying

个活钱呢？除了这几粒租谷以外！……至于去年我借给你的豆子，你就更不能说什么开恩不开恩。那是救过你们性命的东西啦！借给你吃已算是开过恩了，现在你还好意思说一句不还吗？……”

“不是不还八爷，我是想要求八爷在利钱上……”

“我知道呀！我怎能使你吃亏呢？借豆子的不止你一个人。你的能够少，别人的也能够少。这是万万做不到的事情啊！至于种谷，那更不是我的事情，我仅仅经了一下手，那是县库里的东西，我怎么能够做主呢？”

“是的，八爷说的也是真情！云普老了，这次只要求八爷三爹格外开一回恩，下年收成如果好，我决不拖欠！一切沾爷们的光！……”

云普叔的脸色十分地沮丧了，说话时的喉咙也硬酸酸的。无论如何，他要在这儿尽情地哀告。至少，一年的吃用是要求到的。

“不行！常年我还可以通融一点，今年半点也不能行！假使每个人都和你一样的麻烦，那还了得！而且我也没有那许多精神来应付他们。不过，你是太可怜了，八爷也决不会使你吃亏的。你今年除去还捐还债以外，实实在在还能落到手几多？你不妨报出来给我听听看！”

your debts and taxes? Why not give me the figures and let me see."

"It couldn't be that Mr. He doesn't already know what the calculations are. I reaped altogether 150 piculs of grain from which Mr. Li will demand payment, Mr. Chen will demand payment, and from which must also be deducted the money for the Security Bureau, taxes...."

"How come you only got such a little?"

"That's all, I can swear...."

"Then let me do some calculations for you."

Mr. He then turned around and called to his bookkeeper in the blue gown: "Please calculate the amount of rent and money Yunpu owes me."

"Master, the figures are ready. The money he owes for the rent, the seed grain and the beans borrowed plus interest comes up to 103.56 piculs of grain altogether. We price Yunpu's grain at 1.36 dollars per picul."

"Well Mr. Li, how about you?"

"Not more than thirty piculs I should think."

"He must pay the Dyke Administration about ten piculs," added Director Chen.

"Then Yunpu, you are still not in the red. Why are you being so troublesome?"

"Please, Mr. He, don't you think my family have to eat! There's also the taxes to pay. Please, Mr. He, I must beg of you to be merciful...."

Tears were streaming out of Uncle Yunpu's eyes. At this critical

“这还打得过八爷的手板心吗？一共收下来一百五十担谷子，三爹也要，陈老爷也要，团防局也要，捐钱，粮饷，……”

“哪里只有这一点呢？”

“真的！我可以赌咒！……”

“那么，我来给你算算看！”

八爷一面说着，一面回头叫了那位穿蓝布长衫的算租先生：

“涤新！你把云普欠我的租和账算算看？”

“八爷，算好了！连租谷，种子，豆子钱，头利一共一百零三担五斗六升！云普的谷，每担作价一块三角六。”

“三爹你呢？”

“大约也不过三十担吧！”

“堤局约十来担光景！”陈局长说。

“那么，云普你也没有什么开销不来呀！为什么要这样噜苏呢？”

“哎呀！八爷！我一家老小不吃吗？还有团防费，粮饷，捐钱都在里面！八爷呀！总要你老人家开恩！……”

云普叔的眼泪跑出来了！在这种紧急关头

moment, he could only try to arouse the pity of his creditors by begging until the bitter end. He finally went down on his knees before them, and kowtowed several times, knocking his head hard on the ground as if he were worshipping Buddha.

"Please, Mr. He and Mr. Li, you must save my old skin...."

"Uh! uh... all right, Yunpu, I promise you. But you must not keep back a single kernel of the grain you owe me under the rent and debt. When you really find it hard to manage in the future, I'll again lend you some grain to feed your family. Furthermore, you must send in your grain by tomorrow. One day's delay and I shall charge one day's interest, 4.5%, 4.5%!..."

"Oh, Mr. He."

Early the next morning, Uncle Yunpu, his eyes full of tears, woke Shaopu, and together they opened the door of the barn. Mr. Li's and Mr. He's hired hands were waiting outside. This showed how considerate they were. They were afraid that Uncle Yunpu could not manage to transport so much grain in one day by himself and had sent their own hired hands over to help carry it.

Golden, sturdy grain was measured picul by picul and taken from the barn. Yunpu felt that a thousand sharp knives were stabbing into his heart. Tears trickled down one by one and shivers shook him wave after wave. Yingying's tear-stained face, his aching muscles, the burning sun, the storming flood, Mercy Powder, tree bark... memories of all these crowded into his mind.

Every hired hand had already slung the carrying pole, which balanced two baskets of rice, onto his shoulders. Turning back,

中,他只有用最后的哀告来博取爷们的怜悯心。他终于跪下来了,向爷们像拜菩萨一样地叩了三四个响头。

“八爷三爹呀!你老人家总要救救我这老东西!……”

“唔!……好!云普,我答应你。可是,现在的租谷借款项下,一粒也不能拖欠。等你将来到了真正不能过门的时候,我再借给你一些吃谷是可以的!并且,明天你就要替我把谷子送来!多挨一天,我便多要一天的利息!四分五!四分五!……”

“八爷呀!”

第二天的清早,云普叔眼泪汪汪地叫起来了少普,把仓门打开。何八爷李三爹的长工都在外面等待着。这是爷们的恩典,怕云普叔一天送去不了这许多,特地打发自家的长工来帮忙挑运。

黄黄的,壮壮的谷子,一担一担地从仓孔中量出来,云普叔的心中,像有千万利刀在那里宰割。眼泪水一点一点地淌下,浑身阵阵地发颤。英英满面泪容的影子、蚕豆子的滋味、火烈的太阳,狂阔的大水、观音粉、树皮,……都趁着这个机会,一齐涌上了云普叔的心头。

长工的谷子已经挑上肩了,回头叫着云普叔:

“走呀!”

they said to Uncle Yunpu, "Let's go."

Uncle Yunpu heaved a pole to his shoulder with all his strength. The grain seemed to weigh a thousand catties, and sweat poured down his face. He glared with hatred towards the farmstead of Mr. He and stepped out of his own door. His feet barely managed to take a few steps, and then they felt as if they were treading on nails. He wanted to put down his load and rest a moment, but his head was swimming, and the aching in his heart was too much to bear.

"Oh, Heaven!" he shrieked as he fell to the ground, spilling the grain everywhere.

"Shaopu, Shaopu, your Dad has fainted."

"Dad, Dad, oh Daddy...."

"Yunpu, Yunpu...."

"Mama, Mama come quick, something's happened to Dad."

Mrs. Yunpu dashed out from the house and they carried Uncle Yunpu to a board lying at the foot of the stage. She massaged his limbs gently.

"Have you any pain anywhere?"

"Huh...."

Uncle Yunpu kept his eyes closed. The hired hands carried off the grain picul by picul. They walked past the place where Uncle Yunpu lay, and the sound of their footsteps pounded upon Yunpu's heart. Slowly, blood oozed out of his mouth.

Just then, the *jia zhang* burst in with a committeeman and two armed soldiers. They were followed by five or six men with baskets and carrying poles.

云普叔用力地把谷子挑起来，像有一千斤重。汗如大雨一样地落着！举眼恨恨地对准何八爷的庄上望了一下，两腿才跨出头门。勉强地移过三五步，脚底下活像着了锐刺一般地疼痛。他想放下来停一停，然而头脑昏眩了，经不起一阵心房的惨痛，便横身倒下来了！

“天啦！”

他只猛叫了这么一句，谷子倾翻了一满地。

“少普！少普！你爹爹发痧！”

“爹爹！爹爹！爹爹呀！……”

“云普，云普！”

“妈妈来呀，爹爹不好了！”

云普婶也急急地从里面跑出来，把云普叔抬卧在戏台下的一块门板上，轻轻地在他的浑身上下捶动着：

“你有什么地方难过吗？”

“唔！……”

云普叔的眼睛闭上了。长工将一担一担的谷子从云普叔的身边挑过，脚板来往的声音，统统像踏在云普叔的心上。渐渐地，在他的口里冒出了鲜血来。

保甲正带着一位委员老爷和两个佩盒子炮的大兵闯进来了。后面还跟着五六个备有箩筐扁担的工役。

"How come? Is Yunpu ill?"

Shaopu walked over and greeted them: "No, he just worked a bit and had a stroke!"

"Oh!..."

"Yunpu, Yunpu!"

"What is it, Chief?" Shaopu asked in his father's stead.

"We're collecting the taxes. The anti-communist tax, the patriotic tax and the security tax. Altogether your Dad owes 17.19 dollars, which, computed in grain, is 14.303 piculs priced at 1.20 per picul."

"Oh! When must you have it?"

"We'll take it right away."

"Oh! Oh...."

Shaopu looked at his Dad, then he turned to the soldiers and the *jiazhang*; he was at a complete loss. Mr. He's and Mr. Li's hired hands had jnmped into the barn and were measuring the grain by themselves and taking it away. The *jia zhang* quickly pushed in also.

"Come!"

The men with the baskets swarmed in and got ready to take the grain.

"Are they all robbers then?" Shaopu's head cleared, and great indignation filled his heart. With bloodshot eyes, he stared at them, and rage swept over him. He simply could not understand why the grain they had reaped by hard labour was given to other people to be carried away picul by picul. And such beastly, unreasonable people at that! He gritted his teeth. So intense was his de-

“怎么！云普生病了吗？”

少普随即走来打了招呼：

“不是的，刚刚劳动了一下，发痧！”

“唔！……”

“云普！云普！”

“有什么事情呀，甲老爷？”少普代替说。

“收捐款的！剿共，救国，团防，你爹爹名下一共一十七元一角九分。算谷是一十四担三斗零三合。定价一元二角整！”

“唔！几时要呢？”

“马上就要量谷的！”

“啊！啊啊！……”

少普望着自己的爹爹，又望望大兵和保甲，他完全莫明其妙地发痴了！何李两家的长工，都自动地跳进了仓门那里量谷。保甲爷也赶着钻了进去：

“来呀！”

外面等着的一群工役统统跑进来了。都放下箩筐来准备装谷子。

“他们难道都是强盗吗？”

少普清醒过来了，心中涌上着异样的恼愤。他举着血红的眼睛，望了这一群人，心火一把一把地往上冒。他始终不明白，为什么自己辛辛苦苦种下来的谷子，都一担一担地送给人家挑走。这些人又都那样地不讲理性。他咬紧了牙

sire to grab one or the other of these robbers and give him a good beating, that he was able to restrain himself only because of the armed soldiers who were glaring threateningly at him.

"Oh, oh...."

"Dad, are you feeling better?"

"Oh!..."

In only half an hour, the hired hands and the men were all gone. The *jia zhang* slowly stepped out of the barn, and with his eyes on the committeeman, said: "It's all gone. After He and Li took the rent and the payment due to the Dyke Administration, that left us short of 3.35 piculs for the taxes."

"Then give him three days' time limit to have the shortage brought to town. You notify him."

"Shaopu, remember to tell your Dad that he's short of 3.35 piculs for taxes. He must send it to the Bureau himself within three days, otherwise soldiers will come to arrest him," the *jia zhang* said fiercely.

"Oh!"

They disappeared before Shaopu's hazy eyes. He turned towards the barn door. There was nothing left but the thin bare boards of the floor. His head felt dizzy, and the whole world seemed to be going in circles.

"Oh, oh!..."

"Dad, oh Dad!..."

IX

Liqiu came back at midnight.

齿，想跑上去把这些强盗抓几个来饱打一顿，要不是旁边两个佩盒子炮的向他钉了几眼。

“唔！……唔！……哎呀！……”

“爹爹！好了一点吗？……”

“唔！……”

只有半点钟功夫，工役长工们都走光了。保甲慢慢地从仓孔中爬出来，望着那位委员老爷说道：

“完了，除去何李两家的租谷和堤费外，捐款还不够三担三斗多些。”

“那么，限他三天之内自己送到镇上去！你关照他一声。”

“少普！你等一会告诉你爹爹，还差三担三斗五升多捐款，限他三天内亲自送到局里去！不然，随即就会派兵来抓人。”保甲恶狠狠地传达着。

“唔！”

人们在少普朦胧的视线中消失了。他转身向仓孔中一望：天哪！那里面只剩了几块薄薄的仓板子了。

他的眼睛发了昏，整个的世界都好像在团团地旋转！

“唔……哎哟！……”

“爹爹呀！……”

九

立秋回来了，时候是黑暗无光的午夜！

"So there really are robbers who steal grain, just as I said." Uncle Yunpu had been in a coma on and off. He took hold of Liqiu's wrist in a tight grip and said tremulously: "Liqiu, where is our grain? This year, this year, we've had an unusually rich harvest."

Liqiu's heart was heavy. He set his teeth, and in an effort to comfort his father, said: "Never mind, Dad, why feel so bad? Didn't I tell you it would happen like this? Sooner or later there's going to be a day of reckoning, as long as we don't allow ourselves to be fooled again. Up until now most of the people in the village have decided not to pay any rent or taxes. There's no doubt but that it will lead to a real struggle. Tonight I must go to a meeting."

"Ah! . . ."

Dimly, Uncle Yunpu felt as if he'd come through a horrible nightmare. Vaguely he seemed to understand why his son Liqiu had been absent from home so often. The thought of the Peasants' Association formed in 1926-1927 suddenly came into his head. With much effort he opened his eyes and with a bitter smile said hesitatingly: "Well, good, good! You go. And I hope Heaven will bless all of you."

Translated by Tang Sheng

"真的有抢谷的强盗啊!"

云普叔又继连地发了几次昏。他紧紧地把握着立秋的手腕,颤动地说道:

"立秋!我们的谷子呢?今年,今年是一个少有的丰年呀!"

立秋的心房创痛了!半晌,才咬紧牙关地安慰了他的爹爹:

"不要紧的哟!爹爹。你老人家何必这样伤心呢?我不是早就对你老人家说过了吗?迟早总有一天的,只要我们不再上当了。现在垄上还有大半没有纳租谷还捐的人,都准备好了不理他们。要不然,就是一次大的拚命!今晚,我还要到那边去呢!"

"啊!……"

模糊中云普叔像做了一场大梦。他隐约地了解儿子立秋不常在家的原因。十五六年农民会的影子,突然地浮上了他的脑海里。勉强地展开着眼睛,苦笑地望了立秋一眼,很迟疑地说道:

"好、好、好啊!你去吧,愿天老爷保佑他们!"

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Fire

His face the mottled grey of spirit money burnt for the dead, his pallid lips pursed tightly together, his stubby brows knit, Mr. He waddled back and forth across the room in his slippers, a hookah in his hands. He kept drawing at his pipe, sending the water bubbling noisily in the bottle. The bluish smoke crept out of his nostrils, swirled upward, then vanished into thin air.

It was approaching Mid-autumn Festival, but tonight the sky looked unusually gloomy with not a star in sight. The room was lighted by only a bean-sized flame wavering uneasily in the little oil lamp on the opium couch. Everything was so still outside that the occasional bark of a dog pierced one straight to the heart.

How dismal! Even the yelp of the dog sounded ominous. Mr. He stamped his feet irritably a few times, then turned his eyes to the woman reclining on the smoking couch.

The woman, who was called Flowery Sister and was the wife of house-servant Gao, nicknamed Melonseed, made a wry face at Mr. He.

"What is it now?" she asked. "Why don't you go to bed? Why bother yourself with such trifles, Master? After all, who could slip out of your hands?"

"What do you women understand?" Mr. He swore. He went on pacing the floor. After a few more rounds he sank down on the

火

一

何八爷的脸色白得像烧过了的钱纸灰，八字眉毛紧紧地蹙着，嘴唇和脸色一样，闭得牢牢的，只看见一条线缝。

拖着鞋子，双手抱住一根水烟袋，在房中来回地踱着。烟袋里的水咕咚咕咚地响，青烟从鼻孔里钻出来，打了一个翻身，便轻轻地向空间飞散。

天黑得怕人，快要到中秋了，连一颗星星都看不见，房间里只有烟榻上点着一盏小青油灯，黄豆子样大，一跳一跳的。户外四围都沉静了，偶然有一两声狗儿的吠叫，尖锐地钻进到人们的心坎里。

多么不耐烦哟！那外面的狗儿吠声，简直有些像不祥之兆。何八爷用脚狠命地在地上跺了几下，又抬头望望那躺在烟榻上的女人。

女人是听差高瓜子的老婆，叫做花大姐。朝着何八爷装了一个鬼脸儿，说道：

“怎么，困不困？爷，你老欢喜多想这些小事情做什么啊！反正，谁能够逃过你的手掌心呢？”

“混账！堂客们晓得什么东西！”

couch by the woman, putting his hookah down beside him. Lying on his back, he stared up at the ceiling, engrossed in thought. His mind was in a muddle and he couldn't see any way out. Flowery Sister took up an opium pipe and began preparing it for him.

"Oh, Master, you simply refuse to believe me. I'd stake my life on it that those trouble-makers won't get anywhere. And what Blue Stoker says — don't you believe a word of it; it's no more possible than for the dumb to speak. Now, you just stop fretting; don't keep yourself worked up like this all night." While she was speaking, she handed the prepared opium pipe to him.

Mr. He showed her a sullen face and said nothing; but as he took the opium pipe from her, he reached over and gave the woman a sharp pinch on the thigh.

"Oh — Master! You little devil!" The woman's leg quivered slightly at the touch.

He took an energetic drag at the opium pipe; but before he had exhaled the smoke, his mind was again plagued with uneasiness. For the third time he got up from the couch and resumed his rounds of nervous floor-pacing.

Somehow he felt there was trouble afoot, trouble that might upset his last two years' plans. "Those ruffians are certainly no tamer than last year — it's shocking," he thought. "No matter what, I've got to hash this out with somebody." He told Flowery Sister to call Wang Dixin in for a talk.

"He's gone to bed," the woman drawled lazily.

"Never mind that, you run over and wake him up."

"You've no more courage than a mouse, have you? Scared to

八爷信口地骂了这么一句，又来回兜过三五个圈子，然后走到烟榻旁边躺下。放了水烟袋，眼睛再向天花板出了一会儿神，脑子里好像塞住着一大把乱麻，怎么也想不出一个解脱的方法。花大姐顺手拾起一根烟枪来，替他做上一口火。

"爷，你总不相信我的话呀！不是吗？我可以担保，这一班人终究是没有办法的。青明炉罐放屁，决没有那样的事情来，你只管放心好了，何必定要急得如此整夜地不安呢！"一边说，一边将那根做好了烟的烟枪递过来。

八爷没有响，脸皮沉着。接过枪口来，顺手在花大姐的下身拧了一把。

"要死啊！爷，你这个鬼！"花大姐的腿子轻轻地一颤。

使劲地抽着，一口烟还没有吃完，何八爷的心思又火一样地燃烧起来了。他第三次翻身从烟榻上立起来，仍旧不安地在房子中兜着那焦灼的圈子。

他总觉得这件事情终究有些不妥当，恐怕要关系到自家两年来的计谋。这些东西闹的比去年还要凶狠了，真正了不得！然而事情大小，总要有个商量才行。于是他决心地要花大姐儿将王涤新叫起来问一问：

"他睡了呀！"花大姐懒洋洋地回答着。

"去！不要紧的，你只管把他叫起来好了！"

"唔，讨厌！你真是一个胆小如鼠的人，听

death of a little old rumour."

"You little witch," was all the retort Mr. He could make.

When Flowery Sister aroused him from his dreams, Wang Dixin lost no time in sitting up and clutching her around the waist.

"I've been nearly crazy thinking about you, Big Sister. It's very nice of you to come!"

"Cut out the funny stuff; it's the master who's looking for you. Get up and look lively; he's waiting in the house."

"Looking for me? What can he want at this hour of the night?"

"Probably about that business of collecting the rent."

"Oh."

"You beast!"

After playing around for a while they went together into the master's smoking room. Standing as far from the woman as he could manage, Wang Dixin muttered timidly to his master: "Sir, are there any instructions you want to give me tonight?"

"Come here, Dixin, and sit down. I do have something to talk over with you," replied Mr. He, wrinkling his forehead.

"Sir, please tell me what it is. If I can be of any service I would gladly brave any dangers. I'd be no man if I didn't repay the kindness you have bestowed upon me."

"Of course, of course. I know your type well; that's why I asked you to come here for a talk. It's for the purpose of — " Here Mr. He paused at length for emphasis, then went on: "It's almost Mid-autumn Festival, you know, but very few peasants have as yet shown any inclination to pay their land-rent; most haven't even so much as said a word about it. Yesterday, Blue Stoker came and

不到三两句谣言，就吓成这个样子，真是哩！……”

“小妖精！”

何八爷骂她一句。

王涤新从梦中惊醒来，听到声音是花大姐，便连忙爬起来，一手将她搂着：

“想死人啊！大姐，你真有良心！”

“不要歪缠，爷叫你！赶快起来，他在房里等着哩！”

“叫我？半夜三更有什么事情？”

“大约是谈谈收租的事情吧！”

“唔！”

“哎哟！你要死啦！”

鬼混一会，他们便一同踏进了八爷的烟房。王涤新远远地站着，避开着花大姐儿。嘴巴先颤了几下，才半吞半吐地说：

“八爷，夜，夜里叫我起来，有什么事情吩咐呢？”

八爷的眉头一皱：

“你来，涤新！坐到这里来，我们详细地商量一件事。”

“八爷，你老人家只管说。假如有用得着我王涤新的地方，即使‘赴汤蹈火’，也属‘义不容辞’。男子汉，大丈夫，忘恩不报，那还算得人吗？”

“是的！我也很知道你的为人，所以才叫你来一同商议。就是因为——”八爷很郑重地停一停，才接着说：“现在已经快到中秋节了，打租饭正式来请过的还不到几家，其余的大半连影

told me that some of the peasants don't intend to pay their rent at all. Now, Dixin, you must know something about this."

"Oh — " Wang Dixin was for the moment dismayed. "About this? Of course, sir. I've heard about such a plot. The tenants have indeed handed together; and even such men as Lin Daosan, Guisheng and Wang Laoda have joined up with them. I've been keeping it from you so as to find out about their whole scheme first. But now that you have already heard of it, it's just as well. In my opinion, we should lose no time in getting prepared."

"How?"

His head swaying significantly, Wang Dixin bent over and whispered something into Mr. He's ear that brought a smile to his face.

"Then it's only those few?" he asked, relieved.

"There are more; but they are the brains of the whole lot. There's Big Lai and Liqiu, son of Cao Yunpu. Sir, you don't need to worry; no matter how many there are, we've got them in the palm of our hand."

"That's just what I've been saying all along, but Master just won't believe me. Really so timid, scared of such donkeys," Flowery Sister interposed. Her brazen eyes roamed to Wang Dixin, dwelt on him momentarily, then quickly shifted to her master.

"You women understand nothing," Mr. He snapped automatically, then turned again to Wang Dixin. After they finished their conference he heaved a deep sigh, seeming to have regained some measure of composure.

"Good," he said. "We'll do it that way then. You go back to sleep now, Dixin; it's almost dawn. Tomorrow, do your job well."

响都没有。昨天青明炉罐来说：有一些人都准备不缴租了。涤新，这事情你总该有些知道呀！……”

“唔！”王涤新一愣：“这风声？八爷！我老早就听到过了呀！佃户们的确有这种准备。连林道三，桂生，王老大都打成了他们一伙儿。先前，我本想不告诉八爷的，暗中去打听一个明白后再作计较。现在八爷既然知道了，也好；依我看来，还得及早准备一下子呢！”

“怎样准备？依你？”

王涤新的脑袋晃了几晃，像很有计划似的，凑近何八爷的耳根，叽哩咕噜说了一阵。于是八爷笑了：

“那么，就只有他们这几个人吗？”

“还有，不过这是两个最主脑的人：上屋癞老大和曹云普家的立秋。八爷！你不用着急，无论他们多少人，反正都逃不过我们的手心啊！”

“是呀！我也这么说过，爷总不相信。真是哩，那样胆小，怕这些蠢牛！……”

花大姐连忙插上一句，眼珠子从右边溜过来，向王涤新身上一落。随即，便转到八爷的身上去了。

“堂客们晓得什么东西？”

八爷下意识地骂了她一句。回头来又同王涤新商量一阵，心里好像已经有了七八分把握似的，方才深深地吐出一口恶气。

停了一停，他朝涤新说：

“那么，就是这样吧！涤新，你去睡，差不多

As he withdrew from the room, Wang turned to glance once again at the woman. She answered him with a furtive sign of her hand, then walked across the room and slammed the door.

II

It was an unusually cool night. The moon peeped out from behind dark clouds, spreading a silvery carpet over the earth. The Lake of the Sleeping Dragon was as still and lucid as a mirror but for the tiny ripples stirred up on its surface by the breeze.

Far in the distance people were coming towards the lake in small clusters. They had stopped under a big maple tree at the lake's edge when suddenly two small boats appeared seemingly from out of nowhere and proceeded towards the maple tree. The water broke into countless arcs of gently undulating waves in the wake of the fast-moving boats while the moonlight spread like spilled mercury over the surface of the water.

Without a sound the boats were moored under the maple tree. The men boarded one after another; and in a twinkling both boats were filled.

"Shove off, Little Second Scar!"

"Any more coming?"

"No, there's only Shellhead and he was sick; we didn't call him."

With less buzz than a mosquito's the boats glided into the water at the push of a couple of bamboo poles. They crossed the centre of the lake, passed through Snake's Head Cove, and landed at Cen-

要天亮了。明天,明天看你的!”

退出房门来,王涤新又掉头钉了花大姐一眼;花大姐也暗暗地朝他做了一个手势,然后赶上来,拍——的一声将房门关上。

二

这一夜特别清凉,月亮从黑云中挤出来,散布着一片银灰色。卧龙湖的水,清澈得同一面镜子一般;微风吹起一层细细的波浪,绉纹似地浮在湖面。

远远地,有三五起行人,继继续续地向湖边移动;不久,都在一棵大枫树下停住着。突然地,湖中飞快地摇出两只小船,对着枫树那儿直驶;湖水立刻波动着无数层圈浪,月光水银似地散乱一满湖。

悄悄地,停泊在枫树下面;人们一个一个踏上去,两只小船儿装满了。

“开呀,小二疤子!”

“还有吗?”

“没有了。只有壳壳头生毛病,没有去叫他。”

声音比蚊子还细。轻轻的一篙,小船儿掉头向湖中驶去了。穿过湖心,穿过蛇头嘴,一直靠到蜈蚣洲的脚下。

tipede Strand.

There the men went ashore just as silently as they had embarked. From the shore a man walked out to greet them. The man, Big Lai, guided them along a tiny path through the reeds and out onto a spacious flat.

Enveloped in stillness, these people shared an unusual feeling of joy; the treasured memory of their Peasants' Association of 1926 and 1927 came to life once more. That was why they were so familiar with these proceedings.

"Well now, please sit down everyone. It's all right to talk here but not too loud," Big Lai advised considerately.

"Is everyone here, Cousin Big Lai?"

"Probably so, except for Shellhead who's sick, or so I heard. Now let me see: one, two, three... that's right, thirty-one of us in all."

After their number had been checked, the men were told to make their circle smaller so that they could hear each other more clearly.

"All right, Cousin Big Lai, shall we call the meeting to order?"

"Yes."

"Then you start off, Cousin Big Lai. If there is anyone who won't listen to what you say, damn it, I'll let him have a good taste of my fist," shouted Simpleton Li, their hot-tempered member, raising his fist high in the air to confirm his statement.

"Agreed. We agree. Let Cousin Big Lai speak first and no objections."

"Agreed," the word so often used during their Peasants' Associ-

大家又悄悄地走上洲岸。迎面癞大哥走出来，向他们招招手：

"这儿来，这儿来！"

大伙儿穿过一条芦苇小路，转弯抹角地走到了一所空旷的平场。

四围沉静，每个人的心里都怀着一种异样的欢愉，十五六年时的农民会遗留给他们的深刻的影子，又一幕一幕地在每个人的脑际里放映出来。

于是，他们都现得非常熟习地开始了。

"好了，大家都请在这儿坐下吧！说说话是不要紧的，不过，不要太高声了。"癞大哥细心地关照着。

"到齐了吗，大哥？"

"大约是齐了的，只有壳壳头听说是生了病。现在让我来数数看：一位，两位，三位，……不错，是三十一个人！"

人数清楚了，又招呼着大家围坐拢来，成一个小圈子，说起话来比较容易听得明白。

"好了！大哥，我们现在要说话了吧。"

"唔！"

"那么，大哥，你先说，说出来哪个人不依你，老子用拳头揍他！妈妈的！……"李憨子是一个躁性子人。说着，把拳头高高地扬起。

"赞成！赞大哥的成！大哥先说，不许哪一个人不依允！"

"赞成！"这个十五六年时的口语，现在又在

ation days had again become popular among them.

"Whatever Cousin Big Lai says, I agree!"

"Agreed, agreed!"

"All right." Big Lai quickly got to his feet and silenced every one with a sweep of his hand; then deliberately and in a moderate voice he said: "Uncles and brothers, this is no way to talk; and please don't get excited. We've come out here tonight not to listen to anybody's preaching or instruction but to speak for ourselves without bias. Just see who speaks correctly and we'll agree with him. We won't agree with anyone who speaks unreasonably, but we'll point out his mistake and make him correct it. Please don't take it for granted that only what I say is right. Simpleton, what you said just now was not right. We mustn't beat people. What we want is for everybody to speak for himself and to speak without bias. Is that right?"

"H'm, no beating, eh? Well, I won't then. I'm a hot-headed fellow; you all know me. Cousin Big Lai, I've always trusted you; now you go ahead and scold me or beat me for anything I've said wrong; and I'll take it gladly."

"Ha ha! Brother Simpleton certainly comes straight to the point."

The group's gale of laughter caused Simpleton no little embarrassment. Blushing, he lowered his fist and sat motionless.

"Hey, no more laughter. We've got plenty more to talk over." Cousin Big Lai quickly took the floor again.

"All right, let's all listen."

"You must all understand what's behind our coming out here in

他们的嘴边里流行起来。

“大哥说,赞成!”

“赞成,赞成!”

“好了!……”癞大哥急急地爬起来向大家摇摇手,慢轻轻地说道:“兄弟伯叔们!现在我们说话不是这样说的,请你们不要乱。我们今夜跑来,不是要听哪一个人的指教,也不是要听哪一个人的吩咐的,我们大家都要说几句公平话。只看谁说得对,我们就得赞成他;谁说得没有道理,我们就不赞成他,派他的不是,要他从新说过。所以,请你们不要硬以为我一个人说的是对的。憨子哥,你的话不对;并且我们不能打人,我们是要大家出主意,大家都说公平话,是吗?”

“嗯!打不得吗?打不得我就不打!李憨子是躁性子人,你们大家都知道的!大哥,我总相信你,我说得不对的,你只管打我骂我,憨子决不放半个屁!大哥,是吗?……”

“哈哈!憨子哥到底正直!”

大家来一阵欢笑声。憨子只好收拾自家的拳头,脸上红红的倒有些不好意思了。癞大哥便连忙把话儿拉开了:

“喂!不要笑了,正经话还多着哩!”

“好!大家都听!”

“各位想必都是明白的,我们今天深夜跑到

the middle of the night. The crop has never been so good as this year. Now what we must think about is how to keep ourselves alive with this grain. We've earned it painfully working on empty stomachs, and we must not allow ourselves to be starved to death any longer. We've had enough starvation. Now we have the crop in our hands; we'll survive only so long as we keep it there. No matter what happens we can't let our crop be taken away from us, for that would mean giving up our very lives. There is no choice. We all want to live, we must go on living.

"... During the last fortnight the price of rice has dropped to a dollar and twenty cents per picul. At that price, I dare say there's not one of us here who could clear up his last year's debts even if he sold the whole crop he's sweated so for this year. You'll remember that at the time Mr. He loaned us the seed rice the price was eleven dollars per picul; now we'd have to give back almost ten piculs for every one he lent us. To say nothing of the money for the seed beans, the farm rent, dozens of miscellaneous taxes, charges for the local defence and fees for the embankment.... I ask you: who can afford to pay all these? Even if you were willing to let them get away with the total yield of your farm, you'd still finally land in jail. Just look what happened in Uncle Yunpu's house — they carried off every ounce of his crop — some one hundred and fifty piculs in all, yet he still owes them three piculs and three pecks more! They don't care a damn what his family of six are going to eat. I've told you the story as it happened; if you have any doubts, you can ask Liqiu here about it.

"It's because of incidents like this that we've come out here to

这里来到底为的什么事？今年的收成比任何年都好，这辛辛苦苦饿着肚皮作出来的收成，我们应当怎样地用它来养活我们自家的性命？怎样不再同去年和今年上半年一样，终天饿得昏天黑地的，捞不到一餐饱饭？现在，这总算是到了手的东西，谷子在我们手里便能救我们自己的性命，给人家夺去了我们就得饿肚皮，同上半年，同去年一样。所以，我们无论如何不能将我们的谷子给人家夺去；我们不能将自己的性命根子送给人家。一定的，因为我们每一个人都还要活！还要活……半个月来，市上的谷价只有一块二角钱一担了。这样一来，我可以保证：我们在坐的三十多个人中，无论哪一个，他把他今年收下来的谷子统统卖了去，仍旧会还去年的欠账不清。单是种谷，何八发下来的是十一块，现在差不多一担要还他十担了。还有豆子钱，租谷，儿十门捐款，团防，堤费……谁能够还得清呢？就算你肯把今年收下来的统统给他们挑去，还是免不了要坐牢监的。云普叔家里便是一个很明白的榜样，一百五六十担谷子全数给他们抢去，还不够三担三斗多些。一家五六口人的性命都完了，这该不是假的吧！立秋在这儿，你们尽可向他问。所以，我们今天应该确

talk things over and think about what we can do to keep our rice in our hands and at the same time deal with these rice-robbing rascals; for we all want to live."

"Beat them to death! I'll kill every one of the dirty dogs myself!" Simpleton Li exploded in a fit of rage. He was jumping and prancing about wildly as he swore. Big Lai motioned him to stop.

"There you go again, Brother Simpleton. You're dead set on beating somebody up. Now tell me — in this time and this place who do you figure you're going to beat anyway? Now sit down and calm down; you'll have your chance to fight all right."

"Oh, Cousin Big Lai, I really... really...."

"Ha ha!"

The crowd broke into laughter; and Simpleton, unable to get his words out, again turned red in the face.

"Please stop laughing," called out Big Lai in a serious tone. "Everyone wants a chance to speak. We must discuss how we should deal with these crop-robbing rascals. Let's start from the left. You're first, Liqiu."

Calmly, Liqiu stood up.

"I've nothing much to say, because I was also to blame for what happened at my home. Ten days ago I failed to stop my father from inviting the landlords and their lackeys to dinner. Next day they came to collect the farm rent and in the end our barn was picked clean, leaving nothing for ourselves at all.

"Now my father is sick and there's no money for a doctor. My whole family is hanging between life and death. There's one thing I can tell you; if anyone hopes for any kindness or generosity from

切地商量一下，看用个什么方法才能保住着我们的谷子，对付那班抢谷子的强人！为的我们都还要活！……”

“打！妈妈的，老子入他的娘！这些活强盗，非做他妈妈的一个干净不行。”李憨子实在忍不住了，又爬起来双脚乱跳乱舞地骂着。癞大哥连忙一把扯住他：

“憨子哥！你又来了！你打，这个时候，这个地方，你到底要打哪一个呢？坐下来吧，总有得给你打的！”

“唔！大哥，我实在，……唉！实在，……”

“哈哈！”

大家都笑着，憨子的话没有说出来，脸上又通红了。

“请大家不要笑了！”癞大哥正声地说，“每一个人都要说话：我们应当怎样地安排着，对付这班抢谷子的强人？从左边说起，立秋，你先说！”

立秋从容地站起来：

“我没有别的话说，因为我也是一个做错了事的人。十天前我没有想出一个法子来阻止我的爹爹不请打租饭，以致弄得一仓谷子都给人家抢去，自己饿着肚皮，爹爹病着没有钱去医好，一家人都弄得不死不活的。不过，我可以告

the landlords and officials, he can forget it. My father is a perfect example. He got down on his knees and begged them pitifully a thousand times, but they wouldn't even spare him half a catty of his own crops — they robbed him of every kernel of it and then told him it was not enough to cover the compound interest on his debts and pay his rent arrears.

"So I can tell you for a fact, if anyone still dreams of being shown a little special mercy by begging with tears in his eyes like a humble slave before those sons-of-bitches, he's out of his mind."

"Did you hear that? Liqiu has told us that to beg like a wretched slave before the landlords and officials only makes matters worse. Look what happened to Uncle Yunpu. So we'll have to deal with those dogs the rough way this time. Liqiu has finished. Now, what have you got to say, Uncle Big Nose?"

"Me? I've lived out most of my years, and I haven't got many more to go. My crop ran to a little more than nineteen piculs in the husk this year — just enough to feed me and my old woman. If they come to rob me of it, I'll hurl my old bones at 'em. I won't let those bastards lay a finger on my rice."

"Good! We agree!"

After the resounding applause had abated, Big Lai motioned Uncle Lin Daosan to speak.

"I say the same. I can't let them rob me of my grain. Yesterday Mr. He sent Wang Dixin, the bastard, to threaten that they would lock me up in the Local Defence Bureau if I didn't pay up my rents before the Mid-autumn Festival. I told him plainly: 'I've got no rice. All I've got is my life; you can take that if you want.'

诉大家:如果有人还想能够在老板爷们手里讨得一点面子或便宜时,我真是劝他不起这念头的好!我爹爹就是一个很好的榜样。叩了千万个响头,哭丧似的,结果还是没有讨得半升谷子的便宜。利上加利,租上加租,统统给他们抢完还不够。所以,我敢说:如果还想能在这班狗入的面前哀告乞怜地讨得一点甜头,那真是一辈不能做到的梦啊……”

“大家听了吗?立秋说的:哀告乞怜地去求老板爷们,完场总是恰恰相反,就像这回云普叔一样。所以我们如今只能用蛮干的手法对付这班狗入的。立秋的话已经说完了,高鼻子大爹,你呢?”

“我吗?半条性命了,在世的日子少,黄土里去的日子多。今年一共收到十九担多谷子,老夫妇吃刚够。妈妈的,他们要来抢时,老子就给他们拚了这条老命,死也不给这班忘八入的!”

“好!赞大爹的成!”

大家一声附和之后,癞大哥又顺次地指着道三叔。

“一样的,我的性命根子不能给他们抢去!昨天何八叫那个狗入的王涤新小子来吓我,限我在过节前后缴租,不然就要捉我到团防局里去!我答应了他:‘要谷子没有,要性命我可以

"When the bastard saw his threat fall through, he put a grin on his face and started talking a little softer. But my old woman had already got fed up with him. She picked up our old scrub-board and chased him out of the door with it."

"Wonderful! Ha ha ha! The wash-board treatment certainly served the bastard right. She's a smart woman."

Next it was again Simpleton Li's turn to speak.

"Cousin Big Lai, don't you laugh at me; I've got fists and I want to use them. I want to be right out there in front when there's a fight. What's there to be afraid of? I'm an old bachelor with nothing to lose."

"Ha ha! Brother Simpleton has plenty of guts."

One after another the men spoke, their eyes blazing with the bitterness weighing heavy on their hearts. How they yearned for the overturn of this world of theirs the way their Peasants' Association envisioned for them years ago.

The thirty-odd people all spoke, after which they began to discuss what measures they should take. Since the neighbouring villages, Zhangjiazhai, Chenziling and Yanpingsi, had already made their plans, something had to be decided upon here tonight so that the peasants in the neighbouring villages would know that they could depend on one another's help in case of emergency.

This decision was followed by a prolonged cheer.

They decided unanimously that with the exception of Liqiu, whose loss was irretrievable, not one of them was to pay any rent, taxes or fees; anyone willing to pay them would be looked upon as either seeking his own destruction or deliberately surrendering him-

同你们去！'他没有办法，又对我软洋洋地说了一些好话。因为我的堂客听得不耐烦，便拖起一枝'牢刷板'来将他赶走了！"

"好哇！哈哈！用牢刷板打那忘八入的，再好没有了，三婶真聪明！"

继着，又轮到憨子哥的头上了。

"大哥！你不要笑我，我有拳头。要打，我李憨子总得走头前！嘿！怕事的不算人。我横竖是一个光蛋！……"

"哈哈！到底还是憨子哥有劲！"

"…………"

"…………"

一个一个地说着。想到自己的生活，每一个的眼睛里都冒出火来，都恨不得立刻将这世界打它一个翻转，像十五六年时农民会所给他们的印象。三十多个人都说完了，继续便是商量如何对付的办法。因为张家宅、陈字岭、严坪寺，这些地方处处都已经商量好了的，并且还派人来问过：曹家垄是不是和他们一样地弄起来？所以今夜一定要决定好对付的方法，通知那些地方，以免临时找不到帮手。

又是一阵喧嚷。

谁都是一样的。决定着：除立秋家的已经没有了办法之外，无论哪一个人的捐款租谷都不许缴。谁缴去谁就自己讨死，要不然，就是安

self as bootlicker to the landlords and officials. The men all agreed that if the landlord sicked his two-legged dogs on them to collect the rent, they'd get nothing less than a sound beating.

"What if they call the Local Defence Guards?" ventured someone. They decided that in case the guards actually came, nobody need take fright and hide indoors; instead the whole family, men and women, old and young, should come out, surround the soldiers and ask them to open fire. Or they might get down on their knees pretending to beg for mercy but actually edging as close to the soldiers as possible so that they could rush upon the bastards, disarm them and kill, kill every damned one of them!

Finally they exchanged words of advice and encouragement, warning each other not to sit idle henceforth but to work hard for their common cause. First of all they should try to convince the old die-hards; then they should join up with the people of Zhangjiazhai, Yanpingsi and Chenziling. After all, they would act with one mind and one goal.

The moon had slipped over into the west. The men's hearts throbbed with unutterable joy one moment, then with seething indignation the next. Scenes from the Peasants' Association, of the unforgettable period 1926-1927, reappeared before them.... Then the boats began to rock in the lake, the oars creaking faintly as they pushed the water back. And once again under the old maple tree, the villagers nodded goodbye to each other.

III

Uncle Yunpu struggled for quite a while before he finally man-

心替他们做狗去。假如他们再派那些活狗来收租时,就给他妈的一顿饱打。请团丁来吗?大家都不用怕,都不许躲在家里,大大小小,老幼男女都跑出来,站一个圈子请他们枪毙!或者跪下来一面向他们叩头,一面爬上去,离得近了,然后站起来一个冲锋,把他们的东西夺下来,做,做,做他妈妈的一个也不留!

最后,大家又互相地劝勉了一番:每一个人回去之后,都不许懈怠,分头到各方面去做事,尤其是要去告诉那些老年顽固的人。然后,和张家宅、严坪寺、陈字岭的人联合!反正,大家一齐……

月亮渐渐地偏西了。一阵欢喜,一阵愤慨,捉住了每一个人的心弦,紧紧地,紧紧地扣着!十五六年时的农民会,又好像已经开展在每一个人的面前似的。船儿摇动了,桨条打在水面上,发出微细的咿哑声。仍旧在那棵大枫树下,他们互相点头地分别着。

三

云普叔勉强地从床上挣扎下来,两脚弹棉

aged to get out of bed. His legs shook so violently under him that he had to support himself with one hand on a bench and the other against the wall. Even so his body swayed like the sails of an old windmill in a breeze as he edged forward step by step towards the threshold. For almost thirty years now Uncle Yunpu hadn't suffered any major sickness, but this time he'd really got one foot in the grave. He was utterly exhausted by the time he had struggled to the doorway of his house. The world had changed and so had his life.

"Ah! Each day is worse than the last. Don't know what this world is coming to anyway." He heaved a long sigh, then sat down on the doorstep and leaned against the wall.

His dull eyes fell upon the door of his empty barn, and the memory of his golden rice stabbed his heart. Averting his gaze, he clenched his teeth. He looked up at the sky. It was also gloomy and grey — at a time like this even Heaven closed its eyes to justice. The ache in his heart became more poignant as he fondly scanned his lovely little farm. But then the next object of his attention was the estate of the cursed landlord He.

The sight of it was enough to send Uncle Yunpu again to the verge of collapse; and for a moment he wished his eyes would close for ever so he'd need never again view such a hateful world. But no, he couldn't die! Bitter hatred welled up inside him, urging him to carry on. Yes, he would live; he wouldn't leave this world till he'd lived out his dwindling years. He'd watch and see first how long those crop-pilfering ruffians dare continue their outrages.

He was no longer out of sorts with his son Liqiu. Instead he now

花似地不住地向前打跪,左手扶着一条凳子移一步,右手连忙撑着墙壁。身子那样轻飘的,和一只风车架子一样。二三十年来没有得过大病,这一次总算是到阎罗殿上打了一次转身。他尽力地支撑到头门口:世界整个儿变了模样,自家也好像做了两世人。

"唉!这样一天不如一天,不晓得这世界要变成一个什么样子!"

他悠长地叹了一声气,靠着墙壁在阶基边坐下了。

眼睛失神地张望着,猛然地,他看了那只空洞的仓门,他想起自己金黄色的谷子来,内心中不觉又是一阵炸裂似的创痛。无可奈何地,他只好把牙齿咬紧,反过头来不看它。天,他望了一望,晦气色的,这个年头连天也没有良心了。再看看自家心爱的田野,心儿更加伤痛!狗入的,那何八爷的庄子,首先就跑进到他的眼睛中来。

云普叔的身体差不多又要倒将下来了,他硬想闭上眼睛不看这吃人的世界,可是,他不可能呀!他这一次的气太受足了,无论如何,他不能带着这一肚皮气到棺材里去。他还要活着,他还要留着这条老命儿在世界上多看几年:看你们这班抢谷子的强人还能够横行到什么时候?

他不再想恨立秋了。倒反只恨他自己早些

hated himself for not following the young man's advice in time to save his hard-earned crop and himself from near death from the anguish of such a loss. After all, the boy was his own flesh and blood and bound to stand by his father. Was there any sane person in the world who would turn against his own folks?

Having thus convinced himself, Uncle Yunpu found his son Liqiu dearer to him than ever. Every day he watched his comings and goings, and would look forward to the news he would bring back of peasants' refusing to hand over their crop to the landlords.

"Yes, indeed! I was the only blundering fool of the lot. I got down on my knees to them and begged them thousands of times to have mercy on me; but in the end it was I who opened the barn door myself and had to watch them strip it clean!" Thus Uncle Yunpu reproached himself remorsefully each time Liqiu came home and related to him how the others had joined together in refusing to turn in the rent in kind.

It was nearly dark, but Liqiu hadn't yet come home. Slowly the old man shuffled back to his room and sat down on the bed. Shaopu, his younger son, brought him his supper, but Uncle Yunpu waved it aside, indicating he would wait for Liqiu.

Indeed, since that night at Centipede Strand Liqiu had been in higher spirits than anyone else. In just those few days he had won over quite a few new comrades to the cause. He had been so busy that he scarcely had time to eat or sleep. Often he wasn't home before midnight and sometimes not before dawn.

But tonight he returned unusually early. He was followed by four or five others, who marched into the room and straight to Uncle

不该不听立秋的话来，以致弄得仓里空空的，白辛苦一场给人家抢去，气出来这一场大病。儿子终究是自家的儿子，终究是回护自已的人；世界上决没有那样的蠢材，会将自家的十个手指儿向外边跪折！

相信了这一点，云普叔渐渐地变成了爱护立秋的人，他希望立秋早一些出去，早一些回来，多告诉他一些别人不请打租饭和不纳租谷的情况。

“是的，蠢就只蠢了我！叩了他妈妈的千万个头，结果仍旧是自己打开仓门，给他们抢个干干净净！”云普叔每一次听到儿子从外面回来，告诉他一些别人联合不纳租谷的情况时，他总是这样恨恨地自家向自家责骂着。

天又差不多要黑了，儿子立秋还不见回来，云普叔一步移一步地摸进到房里，靠着床边坐着。少普将夜饭搬过来，云普叔老远望他摇了一摇手，意思好像是要他等待立秋回来时一道吃。

的确的，自蜈蚣洲那一夜起，立秋他比任何人都兴奋些！几天功夫中，他又找到了不少的新人物。每天，忙得几乎连吃饭的功夫都没有，回家来常常是在半晚，或是刚刚天亮的时候。

今夜，他算是特别的回得早，后面还跟着有

Yunpu's bed.

"How have you been feeling today, Uncle? Better, eh?"

Uncle Yunpu recognized the friendly voice of Big Lai at once. Hastily he nodded, a forlorn smile on his face. Then he tried to get to his feet to greet his callers but he was so weak that his body swayed and he almost fell.

"*Aiya*!" The startled Little Second Scar rushed up, caught the old man with both hands, then gently laid him down on the bed, saying:

"Don't get up, Uncle. You're still too weak to stand; better stay in bed for a while."

"A few days ago I was able to get as far as the doorway, but now I can't even stand. My old bones probably can't hold out much longer. Oh! Cousin Big Lai and Brother Little Second Scar, I'm afraid...."

"Don't worry, Old Uncle, you'll be all right in a few days. Only don't get impatient."

"Thank you, Cousin Big Lai. Now how are the rest of you?"

"We're all all right."

"Did you turn in the rent in kind? Or how then will you deal with the scoundrels?"

"What can we do, Uncle? — No, we won't give up our crop unless they come and kill every one of us. Turning in the grain would mean quick and certain starvation for us all; on the other hand, chances are we'll live if we hold out. Our very livelihood is now in our own hands, and we won't let it go until we die."

"Indeed, that's the only way to deal with them. Still I was the

四五个人一群。跨进房门，一直跑到云普叔的床侧。

“你老人家今天怎样呢？该好了些吧！”

云普叔懂得，这是和颜悦色的癞大哥的声音。他连忙点头地苦笑了一笑，想爬起来和他们打个招呼，身子不觉得发抖的要倒。

“啊呀！……”

小二疤子吓了一跳，连忙赶上来双手将他扶住，轻轻地放下来说：

“你老人家不要起来，站不住的，还是好好地躺一躺吧！”

“唉！先前还移到了头门口，现在连站也站不起来了。这几根老骨头……唉大哥，小二哥，只怕是……”

“不要紧的，老叔叔，慢慢地再休养几天就会好了，不要心焦，不要躁！”

“唉！大哥，谢谢你！你们现在呢？”

“还好！”

“租谷缴了没有？用什么方法对付那班强盗的？”

“我们有什么办法呢？叔叔！除非他们走来把我们一个个都杀死，不然，我们是不会缴租的。缴了马上就要饿死。不缴说不定还可以多活几日。性命抓在自己的手里，不到死是不会放松的啊！”

“是的，除此以外，也实在再没有办法。蠢

only fool," repeated Uncle Yunpu in his unending remorse. "Curse the devils! Had I only known they were such beasts, I... I...." Uncle Yunpu broke into a flood of tears.

"Please don't be so broken up about it, Uncle. What's passed is passed, so long as we don't allow ourselves to be cheated again."

"Yes. But, Cousin Big Lai, the fact is that now we haven't any rice at all; and tomorrow, tomorrow... oh, curse the rascals."

"Never mind, Uncle; you know that we can always help each other. So just stop worrying."

"Cousin Big Lai, my friend, please look after my boy Liqiu; he's got much to learn from you."

Although his heart was still laden with misery, Uncle Yunpu now found himself drawn to these young men, and his past dislike and disapproval of them changed to a great fondness. He now felt them to be full of freshness and vigour, so different from the hopelessness that filled his old frame.

For a while they sat around and chatted; then, with grave concern Big Lai bade Liqiu to hurry through his supper because the situation had now come to a head, and there were a lot of things to be done. Indeed, anything might happen now as a result of the peasants' open challenge to the landlords' dignity, in particular their rough handling of two of their bailiffs, Wang Dixin and Li Maosheng. To bring the force of the local guardsmen and the soldiers to bear upon the unarmed villagers was the landlords' usual method in dealing with their tenants, and one which everyone could expect.

"The most important thing is to get in touch with Chenziling,"

就只蠢了我一个人,唉!妈妈的,早晓得他们这班东西要吃人,我,我,……唉!……"云普叔说着说着,一串眼泪,又偷偷地溜到了腮边。

"老叔叔,你老人家也用不着再伤心了,过去了的事情都算了,只要我们以后不再上当!……"

"是的!不过,不过,唉!大哥,现在我们,我们一家人连吃的谷都没有了,明天,明天就……唉!他妈妈的!"

"不要紧啊!我们总可以互相帮忙的,你老人家只管放心好了!"

"唉!大哥,立秋这孩子,他完全要靠你指教指教他呀!"

云普叔的心里凄然的!然而,他总感觉得这一群年轻人都有无限的可爱。以前憎恨他们的心思,现在不知道怎样地一点儿也没有了。他只觉得他们都是有生气的人,全不像自家那般地没有出息。

大家闲谈了一会,癞大哥急急地催促立秋吃完了晚饭,因为事情已经做到了要紧关头。主要的还是王涤新和李茂生那两个狗东西挨了三四顿饱打,说不定马上就要弄出来重大的事变。请团丁,搬大兵,那就是地主爷们对付小佃家的最后手段。必然的,每一个人都可以料到。

"最要紧的还是联络陈字岭!……"癞大哥

emphasized Big Lai. "Liqiu, you've got to go there tonight, get hold of Chen Pinsan and get him to tell you in detail how they are making out. Then we won't be up a blind alley even if the situation gets out of hand."

"Right," answered Liqiu. "Now, who do you intend to send to Yanpingsi? By now the people there have probably already been forced to pay in their grain. 'Absent-minded' Wang told me at noon today that the soldiers of the Local Defence Bureau had marched down there in full array to force the payment of rents. Our work here will be seriously affected if they succeeded in subduing the people there. I suggest one or two men be sent there as soon as possible."

"Naturally, but it's no less important for you to go to arrange matters at Chenziling; otherwise we won't have a place to retreat to if anything goes wrong. Zhangjiazhai has done a better job of organizing than we have. I heard that Li Dajie, the old bastard, is so scared these days that he dares not stick his head out of his own house. Rent collection is of course out of the question."

"Good. Then let's do it this way: Cousin Big Lai, you go and warn Guisheng and the others to be more careful in the night — the best thing, of course, is for them not to stay in the house at all these few nights. That swine Li Maosheng is a slick bastard, so we'd better be more on the lookout for his tricks."

"That's right; I won't forget. You'd better hurry up, it's getting pretty late."

Prompted by Big Lai's repeated urging, Liqiu was standing up to go when Uncle Yunpu suddenly turned around and gripped his

很郑重地说，"立秋，你今晚一定要跑到那边去，找找陈聘三，详细地要他告诉你他们的情形，假如事情闹大了的话，我们还可以有一条退路！"

"好，"立秋回答着。"严坪寺那儿你们准备派哪一个人去呢？恐怕他们现在已经被迫缴租了！今天中饭时，王三马糊对我说：团防局里的团丁统统开到那里去勒逼收租去了！假如那边的人心能给他们压下来，我们这儿就要受到不小的影响。所以我说：那边一定要很快地派一两个人去！"

"当然的，不过你到陈字岭去也很要紧，要不然，我们就没有退路。张家宅他们比我们弄得好，听说李大杰那老东西这两天还吓得不敢出头门，收租的话，简直谈都谈不到！"

"好了，就是这么办吧！大哥，你还要去关照桂生哥他们一声：夜里要当心一点，顶好不要在家里睏觉！李茂生那个狗东西最会掉花枪，还是小心一些的比较好！"

"是的，我记得！你快些动身，时候已经不早了！"

癞大哥催着，立秋刚刚立起身来，云普叔反身拖住了他的手，颤声地吩咐道：

hand. In a quavering voice the old man said to him:

"Qiu Qiu, my dear boy. You, you've got to watch out."

His mother joined in, also urging him to be careful. Liqiu consoled his parents:

"I understand. You needn't worry about me."

The night was cool and serene under a star-lit sky. As the little group of friends strolled out of Liqiu's house a steady breeze brushed their faces and penetrated them with the late autumn chill.

Before them the whole countryside lay in stillness as though anticipating a great event.

IV

Expecting a call from Mr. Li that morning, Mr. He got up unusually early and started his endless rounds of floor-pacing in his room. He was seething with an uncontrollable rage that burned his vitals with a consuming fire. Indeed! Never had he dreamed the business of rent collecting this year would entail such a lot of trouble.

His hired hands were without exception a worthless lot! They'd go about blustering and bragging, but when it came to a moment of crisis they all turned out so useless that he even had to save their own skins for them. Mr. He was furious. The more he thought the madder he got.

Dressed fit to kill, Flowery Sister breezed out of the inner chamber and brushed past Mr. He as she made for the door. Mr. He shouted after her:

“秋，秋儿！你，你一定要小心些啊！”

云普婶也跟着嘱咐了几句，立秋安慰似地回答了他们：

“我知道的哟！爹妈，你们二位老人家只管放心吧！”

夜色清凉，星星在天空闪动。他们一同踏出了“曹氏家祠”的大门。微风迎面吹来，每一个人的身心，都感到一种深秋特有的寒意。

田原沉静着，好像是在期待着某一个大变动的到来。

四

因为要等李三爹，何八爷老早就爬起来了，一个人在房中不耐焦灼地回旋着；心头一阵阵的愤慨，像烈火似地燃烧着他的全身。他做梦也没有想到，今年收租的事情会弄出这样多的枝枝节节出来。

自己手下的一些人真是太没有用了，平常都只会说大话，吹牛皮，等到事情到了要紧的关头，竟没有一点儿用处，甚至于连自己的身子也都保不牢。何八爷恼恨极了，在这些人身上越想越加使他心急！

突然地，花大姐打扮得妖精似地从里面跑出来，轻轻地从八爷的身边擦过，八爷顺口喝了一下：

"Where do you think you're going so early in the morning? Dressed up like a witch too!"

"The old Lady has asked me to go and take a look at Wang Dixin to see whether his arm is really broken. The poor fellow's been howling all night; it must be hurting him pretty bad."

"H'm, that bastard! Don't you care a damn about him; he's the one that messed up the whole business."

Flowery Sister cast no more than a passing glance in Mr. He's direction and went on her way, while he continued to brood over the exasperating fix he was in. He became more and more convinced that the cause of all the trouble was his mis-choice of a man. He would never have placed so much confidence in Wang Dixin had he realized the man was such a worthless fool. What was there to be done, now that things had come to such a pass?

Torn with bitter resentment, he was hoping that he might somehow or other find a way to save the day, when he looked up and saw Mr. Li there before him. That gentleman was just crossing the threshold into the room. He strode up to greet the guest he'd been awaiting all morning.

"Good morning, my dear sir."

The guest's face bore a frown, but he managed a fleeting smile as he responded to He's greeting.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting."

"Not at all. I just got up a little while ago. Please come in and sit down. Melonseed Gao, serve cigarettes and tea."

"Don't bother, my dear He," said Mr. Li to his host. "What are we going to do? Things here probably aren't as serious. Mr.

“哪里去？大清早打扮得妖精似的！”

“不，不是的！老太太说：后面王涤新痛得很可怜，昨晚叫了一通夜，她老人家要我去看看，是不是他那条膀子真会断？叫得那样怪伤心的！……”

“妈妈的，嘿！让他去好了，这种东西！事情就坏在他一个人手里！”

花大姐瞟了他一眼，仍旧悄悄地跑了过去。何八爷的心中恨恨地又反复思量一番，这一次的事情弄得泼汤，完全是自己用错了人的原故。早晓得王涤新这东西这样草包似的无用，无论如何也不会把那些重大的责任交给他。现在还有什么办法呢！事情已经糟得如此一塌糊涂了！

恨着，他只想能够找出一个补救的办法来。迎面，李三爹跨进门来了，八爷连忙迎将上去：

“三爹，你早呀！”

三爹的眉头也是蹙着的，勉强地笑了一笑：

“早？你已经等得很久了吧！”

“没有！没有！刚起来不一会儿！进来请坐，高瓜子点火，泡杯茶来！”

“不要客气！老八……”

李三爹很亲切地和八爷说着：

Zhou Jingsan and I have been hit the hardest. Our rent collectors have all been sent back to us beaten to a pulp. Li Maosheng is even in danger of his life. I would have come to see you even if you hadn't sent for me. We've got to find some way out of this mess."

"Well, in my opinion, we haven't got a ghost of a chance to get the better of them unless we call out a platoon or two of local guardsmen and put the ringleaders in jail! That's, of course, my personal opinion."

"That's just what Mr. Zhou says too; but, my dear He, I don't think it's such a good idea. Liang Mingdeng, Chief of the Local Defence Bureau, may have a grudge against me. Remember the last time he dispatched his soldiers here to collect the defence tax? We sent them all back, promising him we'd collect it on his behalf. Cao Yunpu is the only poor devil they got a red cent out of. Now wouldn't we be making a laughing-stock of ourselves if we let him know that we have to depend on him to collect even our own rents?"

"What's that got to do with it, my dear Li? Do you think he'd dare kick up a row in a crisis like this? He'd be in pretty much of a fix himself; because if the peasants refuse to pay their rent and taxes, he doesn't get a cent to pay his men either. No, he can't possibly stay out of this; he's not that much of a fool. We're all in the same boat now; without us, he couldn't have got very far. He could never have become what he is today."

"You're quite right, my dear He. Now how many men do you figure to have sent here? From what I hear, quite a number of the

“你看，这件事情到底怎么办？你们这边的情形恐怕还没有我们那边的凶吧？算是我和竞三太爷两家吃亏吃的顶大，几个收租的人都被打得寸骨寸伤地躺着，抬回来，动都不能动弹了，茂生恐怕还有性命之虞！所以，你今天不派人来叫我，我也要寻来和你商量一下，是否还有补救的办法……”

“这个，除非是我们去请一两排团丁来，把为首的几个都给他抓起，或者还可以把他们弄散，这是我的意思！”

“是的，竞三太爷也是这么说。可是，老八，我看这也是不大十分妥当的事情，恐怕梁名登要和我抬扛子。上一次他派兵来收捐，我们都不是回绝了他，答应代替他收了送去吗？那时候他的团丁还只收了曹云普一家。现在我们连自己的租都收不来，都要去请他的团丁帮忙，这不是给他一个现成的话柄吗？”

“不会的哟，三爹！你总只看到这小微的一点，这有什么关系呢？事情到了危急的时期，他还有心思来和你抬这些无谓的杠子吗？收租不到，他自己不得了，捐款缴不上去，团丁们没有饷，他不派人来，他能可把这事情摆脱不管吗？世界上真是没有这样一个蠢东西。大家都是同船合命的人，没有我们就没有他自己，至少他梁名登不会有今日！……”

“是的，老八，你的话很对！不过你打算去

local guardsmen have already been sent out to help collect rents."

Mr. He deliberated a moment before replying: "Too many would cost us too much; too few couldn't handle the job. I figure two platoons would be about right. In my opinion we'd better first round up the agitators, then spread the troops out, posting a few in each household. For instance, a few soldiers will be regularly stationed in your house and mine as well as in Mr. Zhou's. In the meantime the rest of the guards can go along with our hired hands and bailiffs to force the rent out of each farmhouse. We should wind up the rent collecting business in three or four days without too much loss, if any."

"I'll go back and inform Mr. Zhou of the arrangement then. You can go on into town while Zhou and I fix up about the tips and board for the soldiers. We've got to get tough with those tenant wretches, show 'em they've gone too far this time. Well, I'll be seeing you again tomorrow."

"Good, see you tomorrow."

Lolling in the Local Defence Bureau, Chief Liang at first said nothing; then casting a sidewise glance at Mr. He, he began in an emphatic tone as though to impress the landlord with his own indispensability:

"How did things get into such a mess at your place anyway? The trouble is you've come too late. All our men have been sent out to the countryside. Riots have broken out like a smallpox epidemic this year. I'd think your place would be better off than the others, but who knows...."

请多少人来呢！听说镇上的团兵开到各乡下去收租去的很不少呀！”

“多了开销不下，少了不够分配，顶好是两排人！不过依我的配备是这样：首先抓那些主使抗租的人，然后把队伍分散，驻在每一个人的家里。譬如你那里，竞三太爷和我这里，都经常地驻札三五个；再将其余的一些人会同各家的长工司务，挨家挨户去硬收，这样三四天下来，就可以收回来一个大概，至多也少不了几升！”

“好的，我回去告诉竞三太爷。就请你先到镇上去！团丁的招呼，伙食，我和竞三太爷来预备好。他妈的，不拿一点利害给这些蠢东西看，也真是无法无天！八爷，我们明天再见！”

“好的，我们明天再见！”

在团防局里：

梁局长没有回话，眼睛侧面向何八爷瞟了一下，才重声地说道：

“你们那边怎么也弄到这个地步了呢？早些又不来！现在这儿的弟兄统统派到四乡去了，每一个垸子里今年都有这样的事情发生，因为只有你们那边没有来人，我总以为你们比旁的地方好，谁知道……”

"Things were quite all right in the beginning," Mr. He hurriedly defended himself, "but this time some hotheads popped up and agitated the peasants into not paying their rents. That's how the trouble started. If you'll let me have just one platoon to pounce on those few radicals, I warrant you we'll crush their riot in no time."

"What men can I give you? There are only eight soldiers left in the whole bureau. Unless, of course, we put in a request to County Headquarters for reinforcements. But I can't afford to lose face like that. If we can't handle a few country bumpkins, how can we boast about wiping out Communist guerrillas? You're a smart man, sir; you ought to know I couldn't let myself in for such a rebuke even for you."

"You are quite right. But my dear Liang, you've got to think of some way out for me. For instance maybe you could call back a platoon to cope with the emergency, say from Shibayuan or Yanpingsi?"

"Impossible. Three fires broke out in a row at Yanpingsi, and an extra squad had to be sent to Shibayuan this morning where, according to Platoon Leader Wang's report, the peasants even tried to snatch the guns out of our men's hands."

"What shall we do then, my dear Liang, now that things have gotten into such a state?"

Mr. He waited mournfully for an answer. But Chief Liang, quite unperturbed, went on sipping his tea. Then he looked up at the ceiling, engrossed in thought. After a long pause, he slowly lowered his head, and frowning, turned his eyes upon Mr. He. In a bare whisper he made his proposal.

“本来没有事情的!”八爷连忙分辩着,“因为这一回出了几个特别激烈的分子,到处煽动佃户们不缴租谷,所以才把事情弄大起来。老梁,只要你派一排人给我,将几个激烈分子抓来,包管能把他们压下去!”

“现在局子里仅仅只剩了八个弟兄,你叫我拿什么来派给你呢?除非到县里总局去拨人来,那我不能去丢这个面子。连几个乡下的农夫都压制不下来,还说得上铲除土共?八翁!你是明白人,这个现成的钉子,我不能代你们去碰呀!”

“错是不错的!不过,老梁,你总得替我想个办法!是不是还可以在旁的外乡调回排把人来救救急,譬如十八垸、严坪寺这些地方?……”

“嘿!严坪寺昨夜一连起了三次火,十八垸今天早晨还补派了一班人去!据王排长的报告:农夫还想准备抢枪!……”

“那怎么得了呢?老梁,事情已经到了这个地步?”

何八爷哭丧似的。梁局长从容地喝了一口茶,眼睛仰望着天花板出神地想着。半晌,他才渐渐地把头低下来,朝着何八爷皱了一皱眉头,很轻声地说道:

"Well, let's do it this way: I'll let you have four men. You take them and put those few agitators under arrest. If the situation gets out of hand, I'll scrape up some more men for you somehow."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. He was virtually prostrated by the time he arrived home with the four sick-looking local guardsmen. Shadows of night were already beginning to creep across the sky.

It was about four o'clock the following morning when Liqiu finally dragged his tired body home. He had no more than exchanged a few words with his father when there was a sudden loud banging at their door.

His strength nearly restored, Uncle Yunpu, wishing to spare his tired son, said he'd go and open it.

"Who is it?"

"Me."

Uncle Yunpu didn't recognize the voice but, unsuspecting, unlatched the door. A gang rushed in the instant it was opened.

Melonseed Gao, Mr. He's servant, was the leader of this unexpected party. Behind him trooped four local guardsmen armed with automatic Mausers.

"What's the matter, Little Melonseed?" said Uncle Yunpu, not yet realizing what was up.

The uninvited visitors paid no heed to the old man but rushed headlong into the room.

"That's him. That's Cao Liqiu," shouted Melonseed Gao, levelling a finger at Liqiu. The four guardsmen pounced upon the boy, their guns pointed at his heart.

“就是这样吧！我暂时交给你四个人，八翁，你先回去，把那几个主使的家伙先抓下来。假如事情闹大了，我立刻就调人来救你的急！”

“谢谢你！”

失望地，何八爷领着四个老枪似的团丁垂头丧气地跑回来，天色已经渐渐地乌黑起来了。

是四更时分，在云普叔的家里：

立秋拖着疲倦的身子从外面归来，正和云普叔说不到三五句话，外面突然传来一阵激烈的打门声音！

自己的病差不多好全了，为着体恤儿子的疲劳起见，云普叔自告奋勇地跑去开门：

“谁？哪一个？……”

“我！”

听不出是谁的声音，云普叔连忙将一扇大门打开了！瞧着：

冲进来一大群人！

为首的是何八爷家里当差的高瓜子，后面跟着三四个背盒子炮的团丁。

“什么事呀，小高瓜子？”

云普叔没有得到回话，他们一齐冲进了房中！

“就是他，他叫曹立秋！”

高瓜子伸手向立秋指着，四个团丁一齐跑上去抓住他，将盒子炮牢牢地对住他的胸口！

"What's this? What have I done to be arrested?"

"Playing innocent, eh? Rogue."

A guardsman slapped Liqiu smartly in the face, then snapped his wrists into handcuffs.

"Come along," they shouted at Liqiu.

Uncle Yunpu seemed to waken from a trance. He saw Melonseed Gao standing in front of him, and in desperation threw himself upon him.

"You bloody bastard. So you've brought men here to arrest my son. Let him go now or I'll — "

Mrs. Yunpu and Shaopu had also gotten up and they too joined in the fray, wrestling with Melonseed Gao.

"You bastard, you dare seize my boy."

"Let me go. Curse yourself for breeding such a bad egg," shouted Gao.

The guardsmen turned back and freed him from the Caos' hands. After giving Uncle Yunpu a few savage kicks, they swarmed out and sped away with Liqiu in tow.

"Curse you, He, you'll pay for this, you son-of-a-bitch."

Desperately, Uncle Yunpu and Shaopu ran after the soldiers in the blackness of pre-dawn. Mrs. Yunpu, crying loudly, also ran after the men, dragging her youngest daughter along with her. They didn't stop till they'd reached the estate of Mr. He. But its gates were closed tightly against them.

V

The sun rose blood red that morning and hung high in the sky.

“什么事？你们说出来！抓我？我犯了谁的法？”

“嘿！你自己还假装不知道吗？妈妈的！”

团丁顺手就是一个耳光。随即拿手铐将立秋扣上：

“走！”

昏昏的云普叔清醒了！一眼看定高瓜子，不顾性命向他扑去！

“哎呀！你这活忘八呀！你带兵来抓我的秋儿！你赶快将他放下，妈妈的，老子入你的娘！……”

云普婶和少普都围拢来了，拚性命地和高瓜子扭成一团：

“活忘八呀！你抓我的儿子……”

“放手不？你们自己养出这种坏东西来！”

团丁回转来替高瓜子解开了，在云普叔身上狠狠地踢了两脚，一窝蜂似地拖着立秋向外面飞跑！

“老子入你的娘啊！何八你这狗杂种！你派高瓜子来……”

黑暗中，云普叔和少普不顾性命地追了上去！云普婶也拖着四喜儿跟在后面哭爷呼娘的，一直追到何八爷的庄上。

庄门闭得牢牢的。

五

太阳血红色的涌出来，高高地挂着。

The whole countryside around Caojialong was in tumult. Agitated crowds of men and women, young and old, rushed about, shouting. Their voices were choked with anger and their eyes blazed with fury.

"Everybody out. No one's to stick in the house and wait to be murdered in cold blood."

The village was like an ocean in tempest, or a volcano in eruption.

"Come along. On to He's house. We'll save Liqiu, if we die in the attempt."

"Come on, charge into He's house."

Like an angry tidal wave, the crowd surged ahead.

Losing their son was like tearing the hearts out of Uncle and Mrs. Yunpu, who ran at the very head of the crowd. Since losing his crop, Uncle Yunpu had for the first time in his life been feeling keenly that this was indeed a man-eating world. Now he appealed to the villagers: "Brothers, the rascal closed his gate so tight this morning I couldn't get in. Please help me get it open. I want to settle accounts once and for all with that He, the filthy bastard; and I don't care if it costs me my old life!..."

"Charge!"

Closing in on Mr. He's house from all sides, the infuriated crowd sealed the estate up watertight. The people shouted and jostled each other to get closer to the house, creating waves in the sea of heads, the earth resounded with the angry roar of men.

The gate still firmly closed, three guardsmen peeped out stealthily from a corner of the enclosure. The crowd drew their ring

曹家垄四围都骚动了，旷野中尽是人群，男的，女的，老的，小的，……喧嚷奔驰，一个个都愤慨的，眼睛里放出来千丈高的火焰！

"大家都出来，要命的，一概不许躲在家里！"

像疯狂了的大海，像爆发了的火山！

"去，一齐冲到何八的家中去！救立秋，要死大家一同死！"

"好呀！冲到何八的家中去！"

人们像潮水似地涌动着。

疼儿子，像割了自己心头的肉一般，云普叔老夫妇跑在最前面。自谷子被抢去一直到现在，云普叔才深刻地明白：世界整个儿都是吃人的！

"大哥呀！我这条老命不能要了！早晨，他的门关得硼紧的，我没有办法！现在，请你替我帮忙我把它冲开！我要冲进去同何八这狗入的去拚命！……"

"冲呀！"

四面团团地围上去，何八爷的庄子被围得水泄不通；千万颗人头攒动，喊声差不多震破了半边天！

庄门仍旧是闭住的，三个团丁从短墙角上鬼头鬼脑地探望着。人们一层层地逼近拢来，差不多要冲到庄门口了，突然地：

拍！拍！拍！……

几颗子弹从墙角里飞来。

tighter and tighter around the house; then suddenly, when they were almost at the gates of the mansion, shots rang out.

Amid the uproar, four people fell to the ground, blood streaming from their wounds. Instantly the crowd was like a frenzied tiger.

"Oho! They're killing people!"

"Brother Sheng has fallen! Simpleton Li, quickly bring men and rush the back gate."

"Charge!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Good! The gate's down! Charge!"

People rushed in through the gate in an endless torrent, frightening the three guardsmen at the corner of the enclosure out of their wits. Shaking all over, they threw down their pistols on the ground when the villagers rushed up to seize them.

"Beat them to death!"

"Tear 'em to pieces!"

"Bastards! Tell us, where's other one of your guardsmen? Quick now! And where's that fellow you arrested? Speak up!"

"I, I... oh, help! I don't know."

"I will break your damned necks!"

"Oh — !"

Uncle Yunpu came up and bit a guardsman fiercely:

"Won't talk, eh? Tell me where you've got my son locked up?"

"Help! I'll tell you, dear Uncle, venerable grandpa! Only spare my life!..."

"Where is he? Where?"

"He's, he's already been taken to town...."

“哗！……”

像天崩地裂的一声。左边有三四个人倒在地上，血如涌泉似地流出来。人们立时都像疯狂了的猛虎一样：

“哗！杀人呀！”

“生哥倒了！哗！李憨子你赶快领一批人从后门冲进去！”

“冲呀！”

拍！拍！拍！

“砰！”

“好哇！大门冲开了！冲进去！”

牵络索似地，人们都从大门口冲进来！墙角边的三个团丁惊得同木鸡一样，浑身发抖，驳壳枪都给扔在地上！

人们跑上去，三个都抓下来了！

“打死他们！”

“活的吃了他！”

“我的儿呀！赶快说出来，你们还有一个呢？昨晚给你们捉来的那个人现在在哪里？说！……”

“我，我，……救命呀！我不知道他们……”

“入你的祖宗！”

“哎哟！”云普叔跑来狠命地咬了一个团丁一口。“你到底说不说！我的秋儿给你们关在哪里！”

“救救我的命啊！我说，老伯伯，老爷爷！你救救我！……”

“在哪里，在哪里？……”

“已，已，已经押到镇上去了，早，早晨！……”

"Heavens! It's too late! Blast you!" Angry tears streaming down his face, Uncle Yunpu again hurled himself at the guardsman and bit his ear till he drew blood.

"Help!"

Ho! Another crash brought down the back gate. Simpleton Li dashed in and looked around with his hawklike eyes. The moment he saw Big Lai, he asked anxiously:

"Did you catch that son-of-a-bitch He?"

"Not yet."

"Damn! He's sneaked away. We must search carefully; Little Second Scar, you go out and reconnoitre."

Another commotion followed.

"Look, all of you! What's this?"

Everyone turned around to see. There stood Uncle Big Nose, a man and a woman grasped securely by the collar, one in each hand. Grinning, he threw them down at the feet of the crowd.

"Wang Dixin, you dog. So you're not dead yet, eh?"

Lin Daosan walked up and gave the man a kick that sent him rolling some six or seven feet.

"Oh — help!"

"And look at that witch. Damn her. Let's give her a good working over."

"Who'd touch the stinking bitch? Ugh."

Slap — Somebody gave her a sound blow on the cheek.

"Take 'em over there and tie 'em up together with the three guardsmen."

The search also yielded an old woman who walked out of the

“哎哟！老子入你的妈！不好了！”云普叔的眼泪雨一样地流下来，再跑上去，又狠命的一口。

那个老团丁的耳朵血淋淋地掉下来。

“哎哟！救……”

“哗！”

又是一阵震响。李憨子从后面冲出来，眼睛像猎狗似地四围搜索着。一眼看见了癞大哥，急急地问道：

“你，你们抓住了何八那乌龟吗？”

“没有！”

“糟糕！他逃走了。大家细心去寻！小二疤子，你到外面去巡哨！”

又凌乱了一会。

“喂！你们看，这是谁？”

大家立刻回转头来，高鼻子大爹一手提着一个男子，一手提着一个女人，笑嘻嘻地向大家一摔！

“呀！王涤新你这狗入的还没有死吗？”

林道三跑上来一脚，踢去五六尺远！

“唔，救……”

“这是一个妖精，妈妈的，干死她！”

“哈哈！”

“妈妈的，谁要干这臭婊子！拍！——”

一个大巴掌打在花大姐的脸上。

“哈哈，带到那边去！绑在那三个团丁一起！”

大家又是一阵搜索！一个老太婆跑出来，

house knocking a hollow wooden "fish" with a small mallet, both of which she held in trembling hands — all the while mumbling the name of holy Buddha.

"The old louse." Though this was said spitefully, no one bothered her.

The people searched high and low, but no trace of the landlord He could be found. No one in the disappointed crowd, however, was willing to give up and leave the estate.

"Don't worry; just let me ask them." Uncle Big Nose said smiling, indicating his finds. "Tell me now, Flowery Sister, and I'll spare your life. Speak up — where is your master?"

"Oh, Uncle. If you'll only promise to spare me, I'll tell you. But you'd have to let him go too," simpered Flowery Sister, pointing at Wang Dixin who was still prostrate on the ground.

"All right. I'll let you both go. You make a fine pair."

The roar of contemptuous laughter from the crowd embarrassed Flowery Sister. Her face clouded over and she started to speak in a low voice when the old woman with the wooden "fish" rushed up and leaped upon her

"You dare tell him? You shameless, trouble-making bitch. You've ruined my whole family; you've betrayed the master and now you want to have him killed."

The two women got into a tangle, pounding and clawing each other frantically. The old lady had already put a few nail-marks on the painted face of the younger woman by the time people managed to drag them apart.

"Oh, Uncle. Save me please!" whimpered the tousled Flowery

手战动地敲着木鱼，口中“阿弥陀佛！阿弥陀佛！”地念着。

“这要死的老东西！”

仅仅鄙夷地骂了一句，并没有人去理会她。

大家搜着，仍旧没有捉到何八爷！失望的，没有一个人肯离开这个庄子。

“不要急，你们让我来问她！”高鼻子大爹笑嘻嘻地说。“告诉我，花大姐！你说出来我救你的性命：你家的爷躲在哪里？”

“老爹爹！只要你老人家救我，我肯说。不过，放了我，还要放了他！……”花大姐一手指着地下的王涤新说。

“好的！放你们做长久的夫妇！”

大家一阵闷笑，花大姐倒有些不好意思起来。忸怩地刚想开口说，不防突然地那个老太婆跑来将她扭住：

“你敢说！你这不要脸的白虎屄！你害了我一家，你偷了汉子，还要害你爷的性命！”

两个人扭着打转。花大姐的脸儿给抓出了几条血痕！

大家拉开了老太婆。花大姐向高鼻子大爹哭着说：

Sister to Big Nose.

"Talk then."

"Well — he, he and Melonseed Gao are hiding inside that big shrine."

"Oho."

With one outcry, the entire crowd swarmed around the shrine, from which they could now hear clearly the cries of scared men. Big Lai reached up and unlatched the door. There huddled together, crouched Mr. He and his servant Melonseed Gao, covered with dust and trembling all over.

"My precious treasures. So here you are."

Simpleton Li ushered the two out of the shrine in his iron-like grip, then cuffed them soundly as he dumped them on the ground. Uncle Yunpu, his eyes blazing with wrath, seized Melonseed Gao like a starved tiger leaping upon its prey.

"You bastard. It's you that brought the guardsmen to my house and snatched my son away. You've got to pay for that." His tear streaked face contorted with bitter hatred, the old man sank his teeth into the cheek of Melonseed Gao and ripped a lump of flesh clean off his face.

Melonseed Gao was no longer able to talk. The landlord He, however, carried on, yelling like a stuck hog as the people hit and cursed him.

"So your seed rice was eleven dollars a picul, was it!..."

"Your seed beans were as high as six dollars eighty cents, eh?..."

"It was you who stole my land; that's who it was!..."

"老爹爹救我呀！呜！呜！……"

"你只管说。"

"他，他同高瓜子两个，都躲在那个大神柜里面！"

"好哇！"

一声震喊，人家都挤到神柜旁边。清晰地，里面有抖索的声音。癞大哥一手打开柜门，何八爷同高瓜子两个蹲在一起，满身灰菩萨似地战慄着。

"我的儿呀！你们原来在这里！"

李憨子将他们一把提出来，顺手就是两个巴掌！云普叔的眼睛里火光乱迸，像饿虎似地抓住着高瓜子！

"你这活忘八呀！你带兵来捉我的秋儿！老子要你的命，你也有今朝呀！"牙齿切了又切，眼泪豆大一点的流下来！张开口一下咬在高瓜子的脸上，拖出一块巴掌大的肉来！

高瓜子做不得声了。何八爷便同杀猪似地叫起来。

大家边打边骂地：

"你的种谷十一元！……"

"你的豆子六块八！……"

"你硬买我的田！……"

"You raped my sister! . . ."

"Oh, my poor Liqiu! . . ."

Anger mounted in the crowd as they went on pounding Mr. He who was by then half dead. Big Lai hastened to stop them, shouting:

"Wait, Brothers. It's getting late, and troops may arrive from town any time now. We've still got Li Dajie's house to go to. We can't stay around here any longer."

"Right. Let's go on to Zhangjiazhai."

"Let's take these dogs out and dispose of 'em so they won't get away."

"Good idea."

Except for the old woman, they were all tied to the same rope. Among the seven of them, Flowery Sister was the only one who made any complaint:

"Uncle Big Nose. Didn't you agree to let me go? Why don't you keep your promise? Help! Oh, help."

Once outside the landlord's estate all such trifling matters were soon settled. The peasants carried off their wounded and dead on bamboo litters, they carted their rice home.

"Now, on to Zhangjiazhai to deal with Li Dajie and Zhou Jingsan, the two dogs."

Once again, like an angry torrent, the crowd of men and women, young and old, seethed towards Zhangjiazhai.

VI

That night, when Chief Liang of the Local Defence Bureau, at

“你弄跑我的妹子！……”

“我的秋儿！……”

“………”

怒火愈打愈上升，何八爷已经只剩了一丝儿气了。癞大哥连忙喝住大家：

“喂！弟兄们！时候不早了，镇上恐怕马上就有大兵来！我们还要到李大杰家中去，现在我们怕不能再在这儿站脚了。”

“好！冲到张家宅去！”

“那么，把这些东西统统拖到外面去干了他！免得逃走！”

“好！”

一串，老太婆除外，七个人。花大姐满口的冤枉！

“高鼻子大爹！你答应救我的啦！你怎么不讲信用了！救，救，救……”

在庄门外面，轻便的事情都做完了。自己伤亡的七八个人用凉床抬起来，谷子车着。

“去呀！冲到张家宅去！干李大杰周竞三那狗东西去呀！”

仍旧同潮水似的，男男女女，老老幼幼的一大群，又向张家宅冲去了！

六

入夜，梁局长从县城里请求了一营大兵亲

the head of the battalion he had been compelled to request from the county to reinforce his guard, arrived, the village of Caojialong was the picture of peace and quiet. Not a soul was stirring outside.

A scout reported to the Chief: "The rebels have established contact with the bandits[①] of Snow Peak. There's no person visible within a hundred *li* of Chenziling, Zhangjiazhai and Yanpingsi. They have all fled to Snow Peak."

The enraged Chief stamped his feet furiously. To think that in just three days he had lost more than a hundred men and guns, and that his whole territory had become an uninhabited desert. He had not only lost his source of income but was also at a loss to know how to face his superiors.

The Chief's fury mounted as he contemplated the wide expanse of deserted plain. He was looking remorsefully at his powerful army, regretting there was no target against which to employ their mighty force when suddenly a vengeful idea jumped into his mind, and he ordered:

"Men, spread out and set fire to every last cottage in the village. Damn it. I won't leave a single hut for them to return to."

Half an hour later a red glow lit up the night sky, and the sharp crackling of flames broke the stillness in the village of Caojialong.

September 1933

① Referring to the guerrillas of the Chinese Red Army.

自赶来，曹家垄只剩了一团冷静的空气。

据侦探的报告："乱民已经和雪峰山的匪人取了联络，陈字岭、张家宅、严坪寺周围百余里都没有了人烟，统统逃到雪峰山去了。"

梁局长急得双脚乱跳，三四天中损失了一百多团丁和枪械不算，还弄得纵横这样远没有人烟。自己的饭碗敲碎，回到总局里去更交不了差。

愤怒地，他展望着这凌乱的原野，心火一阵阵地往上冒。再看看这一营大兵，自家非常惋惜地感觉得无用武之地，猛然他发出来一个报复似的命令：

"四面散开，把大小的茅瓦屋统统给我放它一把火！妈妈的，断绝他们的归路！"

半个时辰之后，红光弥漫了天空。垄中沉静了的空气，又随着火花的闪烁而渐形活跃起来。

1933年6月10日作于上海，9月17日修正。

Stars

I

Again, for three whole days, her husband hadn't returned. Meichun got up early in the morning. Mournfully, unhappily, she stood beside her bedroom window and stared with hatred and jealousy at the warm rosy glow of the emerging sun. In fields bare after the autumn harvest, diligent early rising peasants were gleaning rice stalks and binding them with straw. Wild dogs, running through a meadow of grass, scattered tearlike dew drops.

It was a long time before Meichun could suppress her misery. She had no interest in cooking breakfast. Lightly she stretched forth her hand and gathered the clothing she and her husband had left on the end of the bed. Carrying these and a bucket, she crossed the living room and walked unsteadily towards the lake.

Dew soaked her shoes and socks and the bottoms of her trouser legs. The sun, rising behind her, cast a long shadow of her willowy pliant body, making her look even thinner than she actually was. Her darkly sunburnt cheeks were tinged with that slight flush peculiar to young wives. Beneath curved brows that were long and fine, a pair of lustrous peach-shaped eyes shone with emotion.

At the sight of her, peasants along the road began talking ani-

星[1]

第一章

一

丈夫整整地又有三天不曾回家了。梅春姐一大清早就爬了起来，悲哀地，怏怏地，在自己的卧房里靠着窗口站了一会，用一种怀着恨意的嫉妒的视线，牢牢地凝注着那初升太阳幸福的红光。在秋收后的荒原上，已经有早起勤奋的农人，在那里用干草叉叉稻草了。野狗奔驰着，在经过的草丛里，挥洒着泪一般的露珠。

梅春姐用很大的时候抑制住了自己的哀怨，她无心烧早饭；轻轻地伸手在床上搜寻了自己和丈夫的几件换下的衣裳，提着桶，穿过中堂，蹒跚地向湖滨走去。

朝露扫湿了她的鞋袜和裤边，太阳从她的背面升上来，映出她那同柳枝一般苗条与柔韧的阴影，长长的，使她显得更加清瘦。她的被太阳晒得微黑的两颊上，还透露着一种少妇特有的红晕；弯弯的，细长的眉毛底下，闪动着一双含情的，扁桃形的，水溜溜的眼睛。

路上的农人们都指手划脚起来了。他们用

[1] 本篇英译文有删节。

matedly. They assailed her with avid looks and crude words. Some stopped work and, speaking loudly so that she could hear, discussed her marital affairs.

"Tell me, Cucumber, why does Lantern Chen leave her home alone every night?"

"Who knows? Maybe because 'the flowers in the field are always more fragrant than those in your own garden....'"

"Some people say she had a lover before she married. That's why Chen doesn't love her. That's why he torments her."

"Ah, so that's it. In that case, who can blame him?"

Although Meichun pretended not to have heard, the shameless remarks pierced her like arrows to the very heart. With an effort she steadied her steps and, clenching her teeth, hurried through that whirlpool of evil. She rushed to the stony reef at the lake front and squatted down, breathing hard.

The clear jade-green water flowed in lines of small waves. On both sides of the reef a number of village women were already washing clothes. Greeting them, Meichun did her best to slow her beating heart, to purge her mind of those ugly, stabbing words. She wiped her perspiring temples with the hem of her tunic, then bent over and began her washing.

The lapping of the water and the flailing of sticks upon the clothes agitated the air above the lake. None of the women cared much for silence, and they took this opportunity to talk freely. They chatted about cooking, about pretty new fashionable dress material, about their in-laws, their children, their husbands; they discussed the sordid details of others' private affairs....

各种各色的贪婪的视线和粗俗的调情话去包围,袭击那个年轻的妇人。他们有时还故意停止着工作,互相高声有心使她听得出来地,谈论着她们夫妇间的事情:

"说吧,老黄瓜,为什么陈灯笼夜夜叫她守空房呢?……"

"谁知道呢?……'家花没有野花香'罗,也许……"

"不,有人说,她是在娘家养过什么汉子来的!所以,陈灯笼才不爱她,折磨她。……"

"啊!原——来!……那就难怪陈癞子罗!"

梅春姐尽管佯装没有听见,可是那些无耻的污浊的话,却总像箭簇似地向她射来,甚至于射到她的心里。她着力地稳定了一下自家的脚步,飞快地冲出那恶浊的旋涡,咬着牙,喘着息,一口气跑到那湖岸的石头跟前蹲下了。

湖水,碧绿的,清澈的飘流着,起着细细的涟波。在湖岸的石头的两边,已经有好几个同村的妇人在那里洗衣了。梅春姐一面和她们招呼着,一面尽量地想把那颗跳动的心儿慢慢地平下来,把那些恶毒的,刺心的秽话扔开去。她扯起衣角,揩了一揩额角上的因为奔跑出来细细的汗珠,便弯腰洗她的衣服了。

水声和捶衣木的声音在湖中激荡着。不甘沉默的旁的妇人们,就趁着这一个机会大家无所顾忌地攀谈起来。她们谈着家里日用的柴米油盐,她们谈着漂亮、新鲜、时髦的布料,她们谈论着公婆,谈着孩子,谈着自家的男人和别人家的暧昧的私事。……

Sandwiched in among the women, Meichun pretended to be very gay, sometimes laughing loudly along with her neighbour. She didn't want the women to see the pain Chen was causing her. But as though deliberately designed to hurt her, the conversation suddenly veered to her husband.

"How long since he's been home?" asked a pock-marked woman of middle age. She had given birth to ten children in the past fifteen years. When she smiled, every mark on her face seemed to move.

"Three — three days," Meichun replied softly.

"Do you miss him? At night — "

"Of course she does," cut in Mrs. Liu, a heavily made-up woman, well-known for her free and easy ways. "Why shouldn't she? A pretty young girl like her. . . ."

All the blood in Meichun's heart seemed to rush hotly to her face. Slowly she lowered her head. She scrubbed her clothes vigorously, stealing glances at the women on either side. When she saw that they all were watching her — especially Mrs. Liu — and felt herself blushing, she plunged her wash so deeply into the water that she and her bucket nearly went tumbling in with it.

An older woman grabbed Meichun and steadied her. Turning to the others, she scolded: "Enough of that kind of talk. Not one of you is any good — "

"Good? At her age? If a man goes out and fools around, why shouldn't his wife do the same?" Mrs. Liu demanded angrily. There was genuine sympathy in her voice. "'What skirt doesn't drag the ground, what broom is free of dirt?' Tell me that,

梅春姐夹在她们中间装得非常快活。有时候，她还故意地跟着旁人大笑几声。她想教人家看不出来她那种被丈夫侵蚀的内心的痛苦。可是那谈锋却像有意要使她为难似的，不知怎么一下子又转到她的丈夫身上来了。

"他已经几天没有回来了呢?"发问的是一个麻面的中年妇人，十五年来她已经生了十个儿女了。她带着笑脸时，麻子就一粒一粒地牵动着。

"三，三天……"梅春姐轻轻回道。

"你想不想他呢? 夜……"

"当然娄!"一个面孔涂得像燕山花的，有名的荡妇柳大娘，截断了麻子的话。"她为什么不想呢? 这样漂亮，年轻! ……"

梅春姐觉得那淤积的心血，是怎样地热烘烘地涌上了她的面庞。她渐渐地把头低下来了。一面使力地搓着水浸的衣服，一面偷偷地瞟视着左右的妇人们。当她看见了妇人们——尤其是柳大娘的那牢牢的视线——都在凝注她，而又感到自己的脸太红了的时候，她就故意地把衣服往水中沉重地按着，几乎按得连人带桶都滚到湖中了。

"为什么呢? 你们……"一个老年一点的，一面伸手抓着梅春姐，一面向大家责骂着："不要再说这些事情了吧，你们都不是好东西! ……"

"好东西! ……年纪轻轻，男人做得初一，我就做得初二。"那柳大娘愤愤地，带着一种真正的同情心，叫道，"'哪个罗裙不扫地，哪个扫帚不沾灰!'暧，黄瓜妈，莫说梅春姐还这样漂

Cucumber's Ma. Besides, Meichun's so pretty...."

"Another mark against you in the King of the Afterworld's book," spat the older woman. "Low, shameless creature. Not everyone's a hussy like you."

All the women burst into laughter.

Meichun could no longer maintain her carefree pose. Controlling her feelings only with an extreme effort, she forced herself to finish washing the bucket of clothes. Then, rising, she hurried through the vulgar stares and smirks of the men as though fleeing from a disaster, and ran home.

Because of the shining red scars on a scalp left bald by scabies, Chen Delong, Meichun's husband, was known as Lantern Chen. He had no love or affection for his young wife. She was just someone who looked after his home, a vessel for the satisfaction of his sexual cravings. From that dull snowy day the previous year when, preceded by the matchmaker and a small band of tootling musicians, she had been brought to him from her mother's house in a red sedan-chair, Meichun had never seen him smile. He cursed her, tormented her, in the still of night he brutally mercilessly beat her. Methodically he rained blows on her chest, belly and legs.... He wouldn't let her cry aloud, and her bruises had to be concealed from outsiders.

Lantern Chen had no brothers or sisters, only a blind old father. The year before, whenever the old man heard Lantern beating her and Meichun groaning, he used to come to their door and throw his staff at Lantern, cursing him for a fiend who didn't deserve a good

亮！……”

“啐！阎王会勾你的簿的！不要脸的，下流的家伙！你总以为人家都像你这骚货！……”

大家又都哄笑起来。

梅春姐可不能再佯装快活了，她用了一种很大的，自制的力量，勉强地洗完这一桶衣服，才站起身来。然后又像逃难似的，拼命地穿过那些男人们的下贱的视线和嘲笑，跑到了自己的家中。

二

丈夫陈德隆，——因为生癞子，人家就叫了他陈灯笼。——对于梅春姐是太不知道怜爱的。他好像没有把年轻的妻当做人看待，他认为那不过是一个替他管理家务，陪伴泄欲的器具而已。自从去年的一个风雪满天的、忧愁的日子，用一顶红轿、吹鼓手和媒人，把梅春姐从娘家娶回来以后，他就没有对她装过一回笑脸。他骂她，他折磨她，并且还常常凶恶地，无情地，在夜深人静的时候殴打她。他像很有计划似地打她的胸，打她的腹，打她的腿，……他打着还不许她叫，不许给人家在外面看出她的伤痕来。

丈夫没有弟兄姊妹，只有一个老年的盲目的公公。在去年，那公公还能在听到梅春姐被丈夫打得辗转呻吟的时候，摸到房门口来用拐杖抛掷陈德隆，骂他是个无福消受贤德妇人的

wife. But this year unfortunately the old man died, and Lantern was able to oppress his wife with less restriction than ever. He also took up card playing, drinking and other idle pastimes, and became friendly with loose women whose husbands were away. Often Lantern didn't return home for four or five days on end.

Meichun was nothing if not a devoted wife. She never said a word to anyone about her husband's shortcomings. Her silent tears and the bruises that covered her body won the admiration of all the old folks in the village. When Meichun heard that snowy-bearded Grandpa Four and rheumy-eyed old Uncle Li had praised her — "A really virtuous wife"... "A lovely flower stuck in a pile of cow dung"... "That scabby-headed Lantern Chen doesn't deserve such luck" — it was as if invisible kindly hands were soothing away all her pain. Meichun felt she had a right to be proud, especially in the presence of those frivolous married women who were rather careless about propriety.

But at night when she was lying alone in the dark, turning restlessly in her cold bedding, her soul seemed as empty and lonely as the stripped autumn fields beyond her window. She wasn't exactly melancholy, but she certainly wasn't glad. Often she couldn't sleep, and she would sigh all through the long dark night.... At times something she couldn't understand would drive her from her bed and bring her to the window where she would gaze up into the vast night sky, alive with clouds and glittering stars, and listen to the provocative ditties floating across the plain and the plaintive songs of the insects....

Patiently she endured. When she recalled the precious hon-

恶鬼！今年，不幸的是公公归天了，陈德隆就更加无所顾忌地欺压他的妻。他趁这时候学会了打牌，学会了喝酒，学会了和一切浮荡的，守空房的妇人勾勾搭搭。他常常一出去，就三五天不回来。

梅春姐对于丈夫是不能说不贤德的，她自始至终没有向人家说过丈夫半点错过。她忍受着，她用她自己的眼泪和遍体的伤痕来博得全村老迈人们的赞扬。当她听到了那雪白胡子的四公公和烂眼睛的李六伯伯敲着旱烟管儿，背地里赞扬她——“好一个贤德的妇人啊！……”“好一朵鲜花插在牛粪上啊！”“癞子陈灯笼的福气好啊！……”——的时候，她就觉得那浑身的伤处，都像给一种无形的，慈祥的，勉慰的手掌抚摸过似的，痛苦全消了。她可以骄傲——尤其是对于那些浮荡的，不守家规的妇人骄傲。

但是，一到夜间，当她孤零零地，躺在黑暗的，冷清清的被窝中反复难安的时候，她的灵魂便空虚与落寞得像那窗外秋收过后的荒原一般。哀愁着不是，不哀愁着也不是。她常因此而终宵不能成梦。她对着这无涯的黑暗的长夜深深地悲叹起来……有时候，她也会为着一种难解的理由的驱使从床上爬起来，推开窗口，去仰望那高处，那不可及的云片和闪烁着星光的夜天；去倾听那旷野的，浮荡儿的调情的歌曲，和向人悲诉的虫声。……

她忍耐着，一切都忍耐着——当她在夜间

ourable commendations old men gave her during the day, Meichun was able to endure anything, even at night.

After running desperately back from the lakeshore Meichun put down her bucket and hung the clothes out to dry. By the time she entered the bedroom she was weak and exhausted. She had no desire to cook breakfast, or water the ox, feed the chickens and ducks.... Listlessly she lay down on the hard wooden bed and wondered why she had so many misfortunes. The dirty talk of the men in the fields and the caustic remarks of the women at the lake front were like the many-pronged horns of some hairy beast rampaging in her breast.

She remembered what her mother said the night before she died and her dying father's instructions: "In a girl's home, she obeys her father, when she marries she obeys her husband. If the husband does anything improper, she may exhort him gently in a low voice, but only at night when their heads are on the pillow...."

It seemed to Meichun that she exhorted her husband all too seldom. She ought to prepare some soft words and at night, when they were lying in bed, urge him gently to mend his ways. Meichun sighed deeply. Bringing her feelings under control with an effort, she slowly began her daily, apparently never ending, petty household tasks.

That night her husband Lantern Chen returned. He was very drunk. In the feeble lamplight she could see veins standing out on his head, denuded of hair by scabies. His face was flushed. Beneath bushy black brows a pair of gleaming bloodshot eyes bulged

又想起白天里那些老人们可宝贵的,光荣的赞扬时。

三

亡命地从湖滨跑回来,放好桶,晒好衣裳,走进到卧房的时候,梅春姐已经身疲力软了。她无心烧饭,无心饮牛,无心饲喂鸡和鸭……懒洋洋地躺在木床上,去推想她那命运中的各种不幸的根源。田野中的男人们的秽语和湖上的妇人们的嘲讽,就像一个多角的,有毛的东西似的,只在她的心中翻滚。她想起了母亲临终的前夜。和父亲死时所对她叮嘱的那些话来:"在家从父,出嫁要从夫。如果丈夫有什么不正当的行为的时候,只能低声地,温语地,夜间在枕头上去劝慰他。……"她觉得她对丈夫是太少劝慰了;她应当好好预备一些温软的话,在夜间,在枕头上,去劝慰她的丈夫才行。这样,她便深深地叹了一叹,把心思勉力地镇静了一回,就又慢慢地开始她那日常的,好像永久也做不完的,家中的琐细事物。

在夜间,丈夫陈德隆回来了。他喝得醉熏熏的。在一线微弱得可怜的灯光底下,可以看到他那因长癞子而脱落了发根的光头上,有几根被酒力所激发着的青筋在凸动。他的面孔通红的,在刷子般的粗黑的眉毛下,睁大着一双带着血丝的,发光的,螃蟹形的眼睛。

like a crab's.

Without a word he moved across the room to the bed and flung himself down athwart it, gesturing to Meichun to bring him some cold tea.

The night was very long. It was late, and the village gamblers were waiting for their guests. After he had drunk his fill of the tea, and Meichun was about to exhort him with gentle words Lantern grew sober. Suddenly, he sprang from the bed. Taking their few remaining silver dollars and coppers, he lumbered towards the door like a bear.

Meichun seized his hand. Weeping, she pleaded:

"People pick on me when you're not home...."

"Who?" Lantern halted. "Don't you worry. Nobody dares mess with me." Flinging off her hand, he rushed out.

The night was very long.

After watching her husband vanish into the limitless black night, Meichun turned and looked at the yawning dark mouth of the open quilt. Her heart shivered uncontrollably. The bedding still reeked of his liquor, but her husband was gone. The place still remained in the small cupboard where the silver and copper coins had been, but there was no more money. Meichun wanted to weep, but she couldn't even do that.

Slowly she walked to the window. She stood beside it a long time. Meichun could think of nothing to win back her husband. Sighs, tears, never moved his brutish heart in the least. She felt herself sliding into hopeless, helpless tragedy.

Standing, sighing, she pushed open the window and put her

他一声不响,歪歪倒倒地走到了床边,向梅春姐做成一个要冷茶的手势,就横身倒了下来。

夜——是很长的。当他喝冷茶喝足了的时候,当梅春姐正要用温软的言词去劝慰他的时候,当村上的赌徒们正待邀人去赌钱的时候,丈夫陈德隆的酒醒来了。他突然地,像一根发条似地从床上弹了起来,伸手到小柜中摸出他那仅有的几块放光的洋钱和铜板,一匹熊似地冲到村中去!……

梅春姐拖着他的手,哭着,叫着:

"德——隆——哥!你,你不在家,人……家……要……欺侮我的!……"

"谁呀?"他停了一停脚步。"放心吧!没有人敢在老子头上动土的!……"就扔下梅春姐的手来,跑开了。

夜——是很长的。

梅春姐张望着丈夫的阴影,在无涯的黑暗中消逝着;回头又看着那像在打呵欠似的洞黑的床铺,她的心儿不能抑制地战栗了好久。被子里还遗留着丈夫的酒气,可是——没有了丈夫。小柜中还遗留着洋钱和铜板的空位置,可是——没有了洋钱和铜板。她想哭,可是——她连哭都哭不出来了。

她又慢慢地走近了窗口前,她在那里站立了好久好久。她想不出一个能够使丈夫回心的办法。叹气,流眼泪,一点也不能打动丈夫的那颗懵懂的心。她渐渐地,差不多要沉入到一种绝望的,无可奈何的悲哀中了。

head out. From childhood she had always loved the night sky. The moonlight and stars had a way of easing her melancholy. Suddenly, as if by some secret signal, a crude amorous song which seemed to have been lying in ambush to seduce her floated in from all sides. First a hoarse voice moaned in exaggerated accents:

A tender miss of seventeen,
Such a pretty sweety.
Knelt there before me,
And kowtowed in entreaty.

Meichun spat disgustedly and withdrew her head. Men like that singer were just too low and ridiculous. What a pig.... But her misery was pitiless. She couldn't fall asleep. Her ear pressed to the window, she listened idly. Anything to drive away the unhappiness that was eating her alive:

Little girl, said I —
Though you swell your knees with kneeling,
And scrape the skin off your brow,
There's no use your appealing,
I won't have you anyhow....

Next, a feminine falsetto piped up. Meichun recognized it as that of a bachelor with little eyes known as Cucumber. Smelly, unwashed, he always carried scent on his person in a woven straw packet.

站着……叹着……之后，她就推开窗子伸出了头来，想看一看她那从小就欢喜看的夜的天空，想借着星星和月明来解一解心中的愁闷。可是，忽然地，像有一个什么暗号似的，那埋伏在她左右，专门为勾引她而来的，浮荡儿的粗俗的情歌，立时间便四面飘扬起来了。

最初是一个沙声的唱道：

十七八岁的娇姐呀～～～没人瞅啦～～～

跪到情哥哥面前～～～磕响头！

……

梅春姐向窗前唾了一口，把头缩了回来。她觉得这些人都是些卑污，下贱的，太可笑的家伙。也不想想他自家是什么东西！……但悲痛是无情的，她睡不着。她把耳朵轻轻地贴在窗口边，无聊地又想听下去——她是想赶去那快要把她全身都毁灭掉的悲哀：

哥说："我的姐姐呀！……

不怕你膝头骨跪得～～～浮浮肿，

额头叩得～～～没有皮，……

你呀！～～～要想情哥……万不依！……"

接着，又有一个人装着女人的声音唱起来了。这声音，梅春姐一听就知道是那一个身上脏得发霉，还常常佩着一个草香荷包的，小眼睛

的独身汉老黄瓜唱的。喉咙尖起来就像那饿伤的猫头鹰一般地叫着:

姐说:"我的哥呀! ……

你要黄金白银~~~姐屋里有,……

要花花绿绿的荷包子~~~慢慢送得来;……

你铁打的心儿呀~~~想转来! ……"

沙声的又唱道:

哥说:"我的姐呀! ……

不怕你黄金白银~~~堆齐我的颈,……

花花绿绿的荷包子~~~佩满我的身;……

父母的遗体呀~~~值千金! ……"

梅春姐越听越觉得下流了;她离开了小窗,准备钻进那洞黑的床上。可是那歌声的尾子,却还是清清楚楚地可以听得出来。尖声的在后面接着:

姐说:“我的哥呀!……

我好比深水坝里扳罾~~~~起不得水啦!……

我好比朽木子搭桥~~~~无人走啦!……

只要你情哥哥在我桥上过一路身,

你还在何嗨① ~~~~修福积阴功!……”

沙声的没有再唱了。一阵一阵的嘻笑涌进了梅春姐的小窗,她用被头把耳朵扪得绷紧,她暗暗地又使力地唾了两回。她想:“你们能算什么东西呢? 癞虾蟆……”

然而,痛苦,悲哀,空虚,孤独,……却又是真的。梅春姐她只能够尽量地抑制她自己,她总还满望着丈夫有回心转意的一日。然而这一日要到什么时候才来呢? 梅春姐她不能知道。因此,她的痛苦,悲哀,空虚,孤独,……也就不晓得要到什么时候才能够解除。

① 何嗨:即是哪里的意思。——原注。

Raucous laughter bombarded Meichun's window after the conclusion of the lyrics rendered by the falsetto. She pulled up the quilt and covered her ears. "Scabby toads," she muttered. "What girl would have you?"

But unhappiness, misery, emptiness, loneliness — these were real. Fighting to hold her emotions in check, she longed for the day when her husband would take an interest in her. But when would that be? Meichun had no way of telling. She didn't know when her unhappiness, misery, emptiness, loneliness would end.

II

In the third year of her marriage, in September, a long sharp scissors flew up from the distant south and bobbed the hair of the women in all the villages and towns.

It certainly was strange and unexpected.

When the long sharp scissors reached their village, Cucumber's Ma was first. Trembling, she begged: "Have pity on me, girls. The King of the Afterworld won't accept me if I have no hair. I'll have to suffer in Hell...." But no one paid any attention. Snip, snip, and her long hair was cut like hemp.

Aunt Pockmark was next. "Don't touch me," she cried. "A fortune-teller has told me that the latter part of my life depends on my hair. If I lose it, my whole family will starve to death...." But nobody paid any attention. Her bun in the back that resembled a turtle fell beneath the scissors.

When it was the turn of Mrs. Liu who so enjoyed making up she

第二章

一

第三年——是梅春姐和丈夫结婚的第三年——的九月，不知道为了什么事情，从南国，从那遥远的天际里，忽然飞来了一把长长的，锐利的剪刀，把全城市和全乡村的妇女们的头发，统统剪下来了。

这真是一件希奇的，突如其来的事情！……

当这把长长的，锐利的剪刀，来到这村庄里，第一个落到黄瓜妈的头上的时候，她就浑身发起抖来。她要求道："好心眼的姑娘们啊！……可怜我吧！我要没有了头发，阎王不会收我的，我要到地狱中去受罪的！……"但，谁听她的呢，一下子就像剪乱麻似地把它剪下来了。当这把剪刀第二个落到麻子婶的头上的时候，她就叫着，嚷着："剪不得啦！看相的先生说过了的；我的晚景全靠这头发，我要没有头发，我的一家人都要饿死啦！……"但，谁听她的呢，那巴巴头就像一只乌龟壳似的，随着剪刀落下来了。当这把剪刀第三个快要落到那欢喜擦脸

hid herself in a dark corner. But they dragged her out. Weeping, she pleaded: "Don't take off too much. I look ugly with short hair." But nobody paid any attention. The girls clipped her hair almost down to the roots.

Then the long merciless sharp scissors fell on the head of Meichun. But she was not a bit disturbed. Unhesitatingly she walked up to the girls and said:

"Cut away. It's all the same whether I have hair or not. I'm a woman who'll never see the sun. What do I need hair for?"

All of the women's hair was bobbed, and all of the women wept bitterly. Cucumber's Ma, because she was afraid the King of the Afterworld wouldn't receive her. Aunt Pockmark, because she was afraid she might have to become a beggar in her old age. Mrs. Liu, because she was afraid her lover would no longer think her attractive and discard her.

The village oldsters shook their heads and sighed.

"Terrible, terrible. Women have always had long hair since the beginning of time. Hairless women are sure to go bad. The world is bound to change."

Only Meichun was different. She attached little importance to her hair. Her husband was tormenting her to death. She no longer had any hope of winning him back. Change, she thought. Let this evil world change, the sooner the better. What difference does it make to me? I'm useless. I already have one foot in the grave....

It was strange, absolutely weird. In a mysterious manner the world really did begin to change. The villages were never the same

红的柳大娘的头上的时候，她早就藏躲起来了，等到寻了她从黑角落里拖出去，她便一面流泪，一面哀求地："少，少剪一点儿吧！……没有了头发，我，我要丑死的啦！……"但，谁听她的呢，姑娘们的剪刀是无情的，差不多连根儿都剪下来了。当这无情的，长长的，锐利的剪刀，第四个落到梅春姐的头上来的时候，她就很泰然地，毫不犹疑地挺身迎了上来，她对着拿剪刀的姑娘们说：

"剪掉它吧，剪吧！反正我有这东西和没有这东西是一样的。我是永远也看不见太阳的人！我要它有什么用呢？……"

一切妇女们的头发都剪下来了，一切妇女们都伤心地痛哭着：黄瓜妈哭着，——她怕阎王不肯收她！麻子婶哭着，——她怕年老时要饿饭！柳大娘哭着，她怕她的情人不爱她！抛弃她！……

一切老头子们都夹七夹八地跟在中间摇头，叹气：

"不得了的！不得了的！……盘古开天以来女人就应该有头发的。没有了头发女人要变的，世界要变的！……"

只有梅春姐，她似乎与别的人不同。她没有把头发看到那般重要。因为，她的心已经快要给丈夫折磨死了，她已经永远望不到丈夫的回心转意的那一天了。她想："变啊！你这鬼世界啊，你就快些变吧！反正我是一个没有用了的人，我的日子一半已经埋到土中去了！……"

from the day scissors bobbed the women's hair. People came, no one knew from where (though some were from Meichun's own village), in long gowns, in short, and they bustled about rain or shine, day and night. They carried peculiar objects of various kinds and colours, and they spoke new words that nobody could understand.

It was strange, absolutely weird.

Lantern Chen also began to change. He became even rougher, more savage, than before. He brought out a long rusty spear from its hiding place in the ceiling and sharpened it until it was gleaming bright. Lantern said he was joining some kind of association, that it would make him rich. In the future he'd get food and money without having to work. He'd be able to play mah-jong and gamble as much as he liked.

Meichun didn't know what he was talking about. When she saw him sharpening the spear, she was afraid — afraid that he would kill her with it. His bloodshot eyes kept shooting glances at her like arrows, as if he wanted to draw her into those crab-like orbs and stab her, burn her to death. Meichun shivered.

"Don't go out, do you hear?" Leaning his spear against his chest, her husband rolled up his sleeves. "I'm going to the association — or maybe somewhere else. Lock the gate early tonight. There's been trouble brewing these last few days."

Docilely, fearfully, with hatred in her eyes, Meichun promised to obey.

And indeed except to feed the ox and chickens, or work in the vegetable garden, for three whole days Meichun didn't set foot out-

二

真鬼气，真是希奇的事情！……世界就是这么真正地，糊里糊涂地变起来了。从那一天——那剪掉头发的一天起，村子里就开始变得不太平不安静起来。不知道从什么地方跑来一些人（本村子里的也有），穿长衣的，穿短衣的，不分晴雨，不分日夜地在村子里穿来穿去。手里拿着各种各色的花样的东西，口里说着一些使人听不懂的新鲜的话。……

真鬼气，真是希奇的事情！……

丈夫陈德隆也开始变起来了。他变得比从前更加粗暴，更加凶狠了。他从楼板上摸出了一把发锈的丈把长的梭镖来，他把它磨得光光的。他说：他要去入一个什么会去，而那个会是可以使他发财的；将来可以不做事情有饭吃，有钱用，并且还可以打牌，赌钱。……

梅春姐始终不明白这是怎样一回事情。当她看见丈夫把那把发锈的梭镖磨得放光了的时候，她的心里就不知不觉地害怕起来：她怕他要用那梭镖将她刺死！并且他的那两条带着红光的视线，还不时地，像一枝火箭似地直射着她，好像要将她吸到那螃蟹形的眼睛里去，射死她，烧死她似的。梅春姐不禁的发起抖来了。

“不要到外边去的！知道吗？”丈夫把那梭镖靠在怀抱里，用手卷着袖子。“我要到会中去了！……不，也许还要到旁的地方去。夜晚，你早些关门，这两天外边的风气不很好！……”

梅春姐用了一种顺从的，恐惧的，而又包含

side the door.

But on the morning of the fourth day — perhaps because her husband still hadn't returned, or maybe her misery was too much for her to bear, or perhaps it was the lassitude of an autumn morning or something else in her environment, or maybe it was just curiosity that impelled her — in any event, she decided to go out for a walk. Taking a pitchfork down from the wall, she bound her cropped hair in a kerchief and set out for their field, she needed rice stalks for fuel for the kitchen stove.

The fields were the same as they had been last year and the year before. The village didn't seem to have changed either, only there was more coming and going of people she didn't know, more fluttering of gaily coloured banners.

In the big old temple a class had been started for reading foreign-style books.

Meichun walked slowly along the narrow raised path between the paddy fields, a curious suspicious light in her eyes. Like a little mouse emerging from its hole to search for food, she had peered here and there at the village for a long time before proceeding unsteadily towards her own field.

Piled in the field were two stacks of rice stalks, like small houses. Beside the smaller of them two men, one in a long gown and one in a short, were talking. Meichun didn't look at them as she forked down enough stalks for two bundles.

"Sister Chen," called one of the men.

"Who's that?" She turned. A young man with a face that looked as if it had been carved out of wood was gazing at her. He was

着憎恨的眼光回答了他。

她当真除了饮牛、饲鸡和上菜园以外，整整地三天没有出头门一步。

可是，到了第四天早晨，不知道还是因了丈夫的久不回来呢？还是因了自己的哀愁抑制不住呢？还是因了秋晴的困倦呢？还是因了另一种环境的或者是好奇的原因的驱使呢？……使她下了决心地要跑到外边走一回。她从板壁上取下一把草叉来，用毛巾将剪发的头包了一下，顺便到自己的草场中去叉两捆稻草来做引火柴。

荒原，仍旧是去年的，前年的荒原；村子，仍旧是去年的，前年的村子；不过是多了一些往来的，不认识的人，不过是多了一些飘扬的，花花绿绿的旗帜。……

在那原先的，住关帝爷爷的大庙里，还多了一座新开办的，读洋书的学堂。

梅春姐缓步地穿过一条狭小的田塍。在她的眼睛里，放射着一种新奇的，怀疑的视线。她像一头出洞来找寻食物的耗子似的，东张西望地把这变后的村庄看了好久好久，才又蹒跚地走向自己的草场去。

稻草像两座小屋子似地堆在那里。在那比较小的一座的旁边，有一个穿长衣的和一个穿短衣的人在谈话。梅春姐没有注意他们。她只举起草叉来叉了两捆，准备拖回家中去。

"德隆嫂！"

"谁呀？"

她回头去：一个年轻的，面孔像用木头刻出

Wooden Image, eldest son of Aunt Pockmark.

"Did Brother Chen come home last night?"

"No," Meichun replied softly. She looked at the other young man whose back was towards her.

"He raised a terrible rumpus at the meeting the night before last, that fellow. . . ." And Wooden Image intoned: "He must have gone out to play mahjong, he must."

Meichun bent and tied up the stalks. The young man in the long gown asked Wooden Image:

"Which one was Brother Chen?"

"That fellow who quarrelled with you people the other night, the scabby-headed one." Wooden Image glanced at Meichun. "This is his wife. She's called Meichun."

Meichun blushed with shame. She hated that Wooden Image. Raising her head, she started for home with her bundles of stalks.

Idly, the young man in the long gown looked her over. Quite by accident, their eyes met.

His face was full and fair, and tinged with pink. His eyes, fringed with long fine lashes, shone like stars. Meichun was very startled. She picked up her stalk bundles and pitchfork, and flew home like the wind.

Because he had quarrelled at the meeting with the leaders of the association, Lantern Chen lay around in the house of his mistress for three days. At noon on the fourth day he filled up on three and a half catties of liquor. Only when he heard that a new man had arrived at the association from county head-quarters and that they

来的人望着她,他是麻子婶的大儿子木头壳。

"德隆哥昨晚回家吗?"

"没有回来!"梅春姐轻声地应着,一面看了一看那别的一个,用背面向着她的年轻人。

"唔!前晚还在会里和人家吵了架的,这家伙!……"木头壳沉吟了一声:"一定是到哪里去打牌了,一定的!……"

梅春姐把稻草都堆成一起,弯腰扎了一扎。……那一个穿长衣的年轻客便向木头壳问了起来:

"哪一个德隆哥啦?……"

"就是啦!……就是前晚那一个和你们吵架的,那一个癞子啦!"木头壳向梅春姐微微地钉了一钉:"罗,这一位便是他的癞嫂子,叫梅春姐的!……"

梅春姐的脸羞得通红的。她的心里深深地恼恨着木头壳;她抬起头来,想拖着草叉就走!

不自觉地,那个穿长衣的年轻角色,正在打量她的周身。她和他之间的视线,无心地,骤然地接触了一下!

那一个的白白的,微红的,丰润的面庞上,闪动着一双长着长长睫毛的,星一般的眼睛!……

梅春姐老大地吃了一惊,使劲地拖着稻草和稻叉,向家中飞跑!

三

陈德隆因为和会中的主脑人吵了架,一连三天都躺在情妇的家里不出来。第四天的中饭

were hiding things from him again — only then did Lantern set forth.

The rice liquor was burning his insides. He hurried, staggering, towards the association, his brain crammed with visions of the hostilely smiling face of the red-nosed old chairman and the astonishing starry eyes of his assistant. Lantern was determined to pick a fight with them. He felt they were contemptuous of him, that they deceived him in every way and did not consider him one of them. The icy expression of the vice-chairman particularly infuriated him, arousing him to the depths of his obstinate, savage, perverse heart.

Passing his own gate, he stopped by to tell his wife to prepare some extra rice for supper. Lantern intended to come home after his row at the association. He wasn't going in order to find fault with them, but to work off some of the fire in his vitals.

About a dozen men were in the meeting hall. The red-nosed old chairman, who had been a farmhand, was waving a bamboo stick and talking to the men, using a lot of new-fangled terms that were hard to understand. The vice-chairman and a stranger with a short beard were writing some kind of a list.

Lantern blundered up to them, shaking himself belligerently like a mad bull which has suddenly plunged into a crowd. After a glance at the bystanders with his round bulging eyes, he shouted rudely:

"What's up, chairman? Why am I being left out?"

Frowning slightly, the chairman ignored him and gesticulated more emphatically with his stick. He continued as if he hadn't

时,他足足喝了三斤半酒,听说会中又到了一个新从县里下来的人,又有一桩事情瞒他了,他才跑出去。

米酒把他的心火燃烧得炽腾起来。他走一步歪一下地向会中奔驰着。他的脑子里装满了那红鼻子会长的敌意的笑容,和那副会长的骇人的,星一般的眼睛。他有心要和他们抬杠。他觉得他们这些人都很瞧不起他,事事都瞒他,而不将他当成自家亲人一般地看待。尤其是副会长的那特别为他们而装成的一副冰凉的面孔,深深地激怒了他那倔强、凶猛的,牛性的内心!

在经过自己的家门时,他停了一下,吩咐了老婆晚饭时多做一些米。他是打算去和会中人吵一阵就回来的。不是要寻他们的差处,而是发泄自家的心中的愤火!

有十来个人挤在会场中。当长工出身的红鼻子的老会长,正用一根小竹鞭向人们挥扬着,说着一些听不分明的,时髦的口语。副会长和另一个陌生的,蓄短胡须的人,在写着一张什么东西的字单。

陈德隆冲到他们的面前了。他故意摆摇他的身子,像一头淘气的、发了疯的蛮牛似地撞到人丛中去!环睁的螃蟹形的眼睛,先向旁人打望了,就开始大声、无礼的喧闹起来:

"会长!什么事情啦,丢开我?"

老会长微微地皱下眉头不理他,手中的竹鞭子更加有力地挥扬着。他好像并不曾听见陈

even heard Lantern's voice:

"...In other words, since the general association spends money and works hard for us peasants, it's only right that we should serve two months in the militia, that we do our best, give our all...."

Lantern was enraged. He lumbered forward and grabbed the bamboo stick, nearly hitting the chairman on the nose with it.

"Quit playing deaf. Didn't you hear me?"

The chairman's nose flushed red as fire. Trembling, he grated:

"Plague spirit! Are you here to make trouble again?"

"What do you mean — trouble? I've come to ask you people: Why aren't you fair? Why are you always hiding things from me?"

"Hiding things from you?" The chairman was shaking from head to foot. He yanked back his stick and pressed it against Chen's chest. "What can you do? We're calling for militia volunteers today. Can you be a soldier? Can you leave your wanton women?"

"Yes," Lantern shouted stubbornly. "As long as you don't deceive me, there's nothing I can't do."

"Brawling, drinking, gambling — there's nothing you can't do," the vice-chairman laughed sarcastically. His large impelling eyes drew Chen like bottomless pits.

Chen hopped with rage. He charged up to the vice-chairman, fists high, as if he wanted to crush his head. In a gravelly voice he cried:

"I'll gouge out those pretty eyes. You're laughing at me. And what if I don't brawl and drink and gamble? How about that?"

People pulled them apart. The stranger with the short beard hurried over and took Lantern Chen by the hand. "Don't get mad,

德隆的声音似的，又接连地说下去了：

“……总之，总会花钱，费力，……都是为的我们种田人自己；我们去当两个月兵，就应该尽些心思，尽些力！……”

陈德隆气起来。他蹒跚地冲过去，夺着老会长的竹鞭，他几乎要打着他的鼻梁了。

“是装聋吗？聋子吗？……你不曾听见我的声音？……”

老会长的鼻子火一般地燃烧起来！他战声地，咬着牙关地啐他一口——

“你这瘟神！你，你……又来瞎缠么……”

“怎么是瞎缠呢？我来寻着你们，就因为你们的心不公平，你们什么事情都瞒着我了！……”

“瞒你？”老会长浑身战着，他使力地抽出来他的小竹鞭子，挡着陈德隆的胸襟。“你能做什么东西吗？今天这里招兵，你能当兵吗？你能离开野婆娘吗？……”

“能！”陈德隆顽强地叫着，“只要你们都不瞒我，我是什么都能做的！……”

“打人，喝酒，摸骨牌，……什么都能做的！”副会长冷声地笑着。他的那一双大的唬人的眼上，就像魔渊似地吸住了陈德隆的全身。

陈德隆跳起来了！他奔到副会长的跟前，拳头高高地抬着，他就像一下子要击坏他的对方的头颅似的。他的声音带着沙了：

“我要挖出你那双漂亮的眼睛来的，你瞧不起老子！不打人，不喝酒，不摸牌！都能行吗？行吗？……”

人们使力地解开他们。那另一个陌生的，

friend, we'll take you," he said soothingly. "If you're willing, come with us tomorrow to the general association and join up. If you really can lay off the liquor and the gambling, everything will be fine."

Lantern's anger mounted. He glared at the stranger. Without bothering to ask what his duties as a soldier would be, he immediately consented. Vainglorious, rough, he was stubbornly determined to excel. Lantern was like an irascible ox. He'd plough your land and harrow your field, but you couldn't touch him with your whip. And woe betide you if you went against his individualistic grain. To him, that was an insult.

As his name was added to the list, Lantern stared haughtily at these men who had dared to scorn him, his eyes rounder than ever, as though he had already attained vengeance for an unforgivable affront.

Hey-hey, I'll show you, he thought. What are you anyway? A pack of pipsqueaks.

After the sun had gone, night, like a huge black demon, opened its maw and swallowed down the remaining golden twilight. Outside Meichun's window countless despondent autumn insects droned mournfully.

Meichun sat beside a small table, gazing abstractedly at food that had gone cold. A little oil lamp flickered before her. She was not exactly waiting for her husband to come home, nor did she feel hungry. In her mind a vague thought, a thought she had never had before, flickered like the little lamp on the table, neither happy

蓄短胡须的人匆匆地跑来拉着陈德隆的手，向他温和地说：

“朋友，你不要生气啦！行的！……你要愿意，明天就同我们到总会中当兵去！只要你能不喝酒，不摸牌，那都行的啦！……”

陈德隆的怒火愈加上升起来！他瞅瞅这陌生的人一眼。他并没有问明白去当什么兵，就茫然地答应着。顽强，好胜，拥着他那一颗虚荣的，粗暴的内心！他很有一股蛮牛的性子，他很可以给你犁地，耕田，而你不能将他鞭挞，尤其是不能违拗他的个性而欺侮他！……

当他的名字被写上那张白白的纸单的时候，他还狠狠地骄矜了一下。他钉着那些有意瞧不起他的人们，他的眼睛更加圆睁着，那就像已经报复了一桩不可解脱的深仇似的。他的心里想：“你们，妈妈的！嘿嘿！瞧瞧老子吧！……你们能算什么东西呢？……”

四

太阳走了，黑夜像巨魔似的，张口吞蚀着那莽苍苍的黄昏。在小窗的外边，有无数种失意的秋虫的悲哀的呜咽。

梅春姐坐在一张小桌子旁边，失神地凝注着那些冰凉了的菜和饭。一盏小洋油灯在她的面前轻盈地摇晃着。她并不一定是等丈夫回来，也不觉得自家的饥饿。在她的脑际里，却盘桓着一种从来不曾有过的，摇摇不定的想头。这想头，就像目前的那盏小洋油灯般的摇摇不定。不是哀愁，也不是欢喜。……

nor sad.

Lazily she rose. Her husband probably would not come home, she supposed. She cleared the table and wiped it with a rag.

Everything was the same as usual: The night was vast, deep. For a young wife it was lonely, mournful, never ending.

The droning insects became more despondent, reminding people to spare them a sympathetic tear.

Meichun slowly approached the window. She was greeted by chill air from the plains. That flickering intermittent thought caused her to gaze idly around. Everything was the same as usual. Only the idlers no longer had time to sing their amorous ditties, and coloured lanterns now shone around the temple.

She raised her head a trifle. A dark blue sky draped the boundless world. The moon, crescent and bent at the waist, crawled through the clouds. Around it innumerable stars gleamed like jade.

The Big Dipper trailed its long handle. The blur of light around its two brightest stars were like eyelashes. A pink, full, smiling face drifted before Meichun.

She was very startled — just as she had been in the field that day. She could feel her heart tripping fast. Slowly, she lowered her head. The loud slam of a door behind her woke her abruptly from her reverie.

The bulging crab eyes of her husband Lantern Chen appeared. He looked a little angry, stubborn and morose. But he hadn't been drinking, and he was somewhat more kindly than usual.

"Not asleep yet?" He lightly patted Meichun's shoulder. Frown-

她懒洋洋地站起来，估量丈夫不会再回来了，便把小桌上不曾吃过的菜和饭收拾着，用一块破布头揩了一揩。

一切都和平常一样的：是夜，一个漫漫的，深长的夜！一个孤零零的，好像永远也得不到光明的，少妇的凄凉的夜！……

窗外的虫声更加呜咽得悲哀了，它们是有意唤起人们去给它们一把同情的眼泪的。

梅春姐又慢慢地靠近着小窗，荒原迎给她一阵冰凉般的寒气！那摇摇不定的，错乱的想头，使她无聊地向四围打望了一下：一切都和平常一样的。只不过是那班浮荡儿没有闲功夫再来唱情歌了，只不过是在大庙那边多了些花色的灯光的闪烁！

她微微地把头仰向上方：一块碧蓝色的夜天把清静的、渺茫的世界包罗了。一个弯腰形的，破铜钱般的月亮在云围中爬动着；在它的四面，环绕着一些不可数出的，翡翠也似的星光。

北斗星拖着一条长长的尾巴，那两颗最大的上面长着一些睫毛。一个微红的，丰润的，带笑的面容，在那上方浮动！……

梅春姐深深地吃了一惊——像白天在草场般地吃了一惊！她觉得一阵迅速的，频频的，可以听得出来的心脏底跳动！她把头儿慢慢地低下来！……在后方，突然地，一个沉重的，有力的破门声音，又将她惊震了！……

丈夫陈德隆的一双螃蟹形的眼睛现了出来。他的面孔微微地带点怒容，刚强而抑郁！他似乎并不曾喝酒，态度也比较平常缓和了些。

“你还不曾睡啦！”他轻轻地拍了一下梅春

ing he said: "I'm going to the county town tomorrow."

Meichun maintained a numb silence. It was as if her husband had caught her in the midst of some illicit emotion. She trembled. Only when she saw that Lantern wasn't particularly noticing her and was in fact better disposed to her than usual did she hesitantly reply:

"I — I was waiting for you.... Going to town? What for?"

"No good reason. Going to be a soldier, just for spite. Won't be back for two months."

He really wasn't paying much attention to her. Opening the thin quilt on the bed, he told her how he had quarrelled at the association and how, in anger, he had agreed to join the men going to the general association to serve in the militia. It might be hard, but he'd see it through. He said they would go to bed early. The next morning she was to pack some things for him and see him off.

She waited until he fell asleep, then stood for a long time before blowing out the lamp and getting into bed, as if she hadn't heard his instructions. She hated this cold, emotionless, crude husband. Later, in the still of the night, after she dutifully let him ravish her body, she suddenly had a new and peculiar reaction. Why, she wondered, why must I for ever endure his torments?... Her revulsion grew stronger and stronger, upsetting her considerably.

She peered shakily through the darkness. Starry eyes with long lashes floated softly, gently in the sky. How strange, she thought. We only met once, yet I seem to have seen him before.... Then she sighed to herself: Ai. Why must I think of such things? What for? But it's true. I really have seen those devilish eyes somewhere

姐的肩头，锁着眉毛地说，“明天我要上街了！”

梅春姐痴呆了好一会功夫。好像有一件什么秘密的私情给丈夫窥破了似的，她的全身轻轻地战着！……一直等她发现了丈夫并没有注意她，而且反比平常和善了些时，才又迟迟地回复道：

“我——是等你啦！……上街？做什么东西呢？……”

“不做什么东西！……去当兵，赌气！……要两个多月才回来！……”

丈夫是真正地没有注意她。他伸手从床上摊开来一张薄薄的被子，他连连地说：他是今天又和会里的人吵了的，所以才赌气地同总会中人当兵去。吃苦，他也得去拚拚来的！……他叫梅春姐早些陪他睡了，明天好同他收拾一些随便的行囊，就同他们当兵去。

梅春姐是等他睡过之后，又站了好久好久，才吹灯上床的。她好像并不曾听见丈夫的话，她是深深地憎恨了这无情的，冷酷的，粗野的丈夫。当夜深时，她本分地给他蹂躏了她的身子之后，她的心里会忽然生出了一种从来不曾有过的，希奇的反响来：“为什么呢？我要这样永远受着他的折磨呢？我，我，……”这种反响愈来愈严厉，愈来愈把她的心弄得不安起来！……

她频频地向黑暗中凝眸着；那一双星一般，长着长长睫毛的眼睛，便又轻轻地，悄悄地，在她的面前浮动起来了。她想：“真是希奇！虽然只一回平常的见面，但那个人实在像在哪里见过来的！……”不过，随后她又想：“唉！我为

before.

Trembling, she looked cautiously at the husband sleeping beside her like a pig. A frightening thought possessed her. She seemed to see the spear her husband had sharpened so brightly pointing at her, gleaming icily, while a pair of round crabby eyes burned her like fire.

The praise of Grandpa Four and Uncle Li again sounded in her ears: "A really virtuous wife.... A lovely flower stuck in a pile of cow dung...."

Her heart was splitting asunder. Into two parts, into four, into little pieces.

Miserably, painfully, she closed her eyes. Heavily she thought: she would retain that honour. She would not permit foolish, black as pitch ideas to besmirch her purity. She would resist those beguiling eyes, no matter what. Meichun decided it would be wisest not to meet him again.

But things never turn out as we expect.

For instance, a mouse will use all sorts of devices to avoid a cat. It will remain in its hole and come out only when it knows that the cat is not at home. And when it hears the cat approaching far off, it will flee. To the mouse this will seem, perhaps, a fairly safe method. Yet we often see a mouse dangling from a cat's mouth. Not only hasn't it been able to avoid the cat, but it doesn't even know how it had been caught.

Meichun was exactly like that kind of a mouse. She ended up in the cat's mouth before she realized what had happened to her.

什么要想这些事情呢？我为什么要想这些事情呢？唉！唉！……实在地，那双鬼眼睛真在哪里见过来的！"

她向黑暗里小心地，战动地望望那睡得同猪一般的丈夫。忽然，她又被另一种可怕的想头牵连着。丈夫的那把磨得放亮了的梭镖，好像一道冷冰冰的电光似的，只在她的面前不住地摇晃，一双环睁的螃蟹形的眼睛，火一般地向她燃烧着！……

在耳边，四公公和李六伯伯们的频频的赞叹声又起来了："好一个贤德的妇人啊！……好一朵鲜花插在牛粪上啊！……"

梅春姐是怎样地觉得她的心在慢慢地裂开！裂成了两边，四块！裂成了许多许多的碎片！……

她悲哀地，沉痛地又合上她的眼睛。她深沉地想了：她还是要保持那过往的光荣的。她不能让这些无聊的，漆一般的想头把她的洁白的身名涂坏。在无论怎样的情形之下，不管那双眼睛是如何撩人，她还是决心不再和他碰头的为妙。

五

事情是往往要出人意料之外的。

譬如说：一头耗子想要躲避一只猫，它是一定要想尽它的方法的。或者是终天守在洞里，或者打听到猫不在家时才出去，或者是老远地听到猫来了就逃！……在耗子本身看来，这也许是一种比较安全的方法吧。但，不对；我们却

Her intentions had been good. After her husband gave his orders and hurriedly departed, she didn't leave the compound all day. She watered the ox and fed the chickens only in the yard. She didn't even go to the vegetable garden or visit any of her neighbours. In this way she could be sure not to meet the young man with the beguiling eyes — or so she thought. But things never turn out as expected. The vat was empty; she had to go down to the lake and get some water. The fuel was finished; she had to go out to the field and cut some straw. At night the chickens didn't come home; she had to go out and find them. The ox shed was filled with manure; she had to dump it in the fertilizer ditch.

These petty chores plagued Meichun like flies. She couldn't shake them off. They came up one after the other, and she had to leave the compound to do every one of them. And each time she went out she met that devil. Only a devil could have such bewitching eyes.

Meichun was extremely disturbed. But the more disturbed she became, the more chores she had to do. And the more she had to do, the more she had to go out. And the more she went out, the more often she met that devil with those devilish eyes.

Who could tell? Could it be that he was deliberately waiting for her?

Several times she ran back after only going halfway from the house. Several times she returned by another path. Whenever she saw him, saw those beguiling eyes, her heart pounded uneasily.

She began to feel that her world was narrowing. She didn't dare to leave her door. It was as if there were no other people, as if the

常常可以看到一个耗子被抓到猫的口中。不仅是不能躲避,就是连怎样才会被抓到猫口中的,它都不知道。

梅春姐就正是一头这样的耗子,糊里糊涂地被抓到猫的口中。

她想是想得很好的。当丈夫叮咛了她一番匆匆离家之后,她就终天关在家里不出门。牛在家中饮、鸡在家中喂,……连菜园,连上村下村的邻舍都不轻跨一步,这总该不会遇见那双撩人的眼睛吧!——她自己想——但,不对!事情是往往要出人意料之外的。水缸中没有水了,她得上湖滨去挑水来;引火柴烧完了,她得上草场拖草去;夜晚鸡没有回笼,她得去寻鸡;牛粪堆满了牛栏,她得将它倾到外面的肥料沟中去!……

这一些琐细的事物,总像苍蝇钉食物似地钉着梅春姐,要摆也摆脱不开。做完一件又来一件,而且,每一件事都是要跑到外面去才做得成功的。一跑出去,她就常常要遇见那个鬼人,那一双只有鬼才有的撩人的眼睛!……

梅春姐会因此而感到沉重的不安。越不安事情就越多,事情越多就越要跑出去,越要跑出去就越要遇见那一个鬼人和那一双鬼眼。

谁知道呢?那一个鬼人是不是也在故意地到处阻拦她呢?

有几次,她是只跑到一半路就打了转身的;有几次她是绕着另一条小道而回的。……她一见到他,一见那双鬼眼,她的心就要频频地,不安地击动着。

她开始觉得她的世界慢慢地狭小起来了。

whole village, the whole world, had disappeared. She saw only one person, only one pair of eyes — long-lashed, bewitching eyes like stars.

He was all around her, those shining eyes were everywhere.

Once — probably the last time she tried to avoid him — Meichun went to fetch some water and, suddenly, he stopped her at the lakeside. He was wearing a grey tunic and carried a long thin switch. Smilingly, he blocked her path with a gesture like shooing chickens.

The breeze toyed with his long black hair. His even white teeth, which were as attractive as his eyes, bit his moist red lower lip.

"Why do you always run the minute you see me, Sister Chen?" he asked.

Meichun lightly removed the small bucket from her shoulder and set it on the ground. Turning away from him, she lowered her head and gazed at her reflection in the lake, blushing to the ears. Her heart seemed to be beating in her throat. Overcome with embarrassment, she said in a voice that trembled:

"I... don't know you... sir...."

"Don't know me? My name is Huang. I'm the vice-chairman of the peasant association. I teach class in the big temple. Didn't we meet in your field the other day?"

Her reply was so soft that a slight gust of wind carried it out of earshot.

"Perhaps you've forgotten. But anyhow, why should you be afraid of me?"

"I'm not afraid of you, sir."

她简直不能出门。好像她的周围已经没有了其他的人物，好像全村子，全世界都早经沉没了似的。她的眼睛里只能看到一个人，只能看到一双长着长长睫毛的，撩人的，星一般的眼睛！

她的四围站满了那一个人，她的四围闪动着那一双眼睛！……

又有一次，——也许是她回避和他碰头的最后一次吧，——梅春姐去挑水时，突然地，给他在湖滨拦住了。他穿的是一件灰布的夹长衫，他的手里拿着一条细长的鞭子。他满面笑容地望着梅春姐装了一个拦鸡鹅般的手势，将梅春姐拦在湖边。

微风舞着他的长长的黑发，他的一排雪白的牙齿同眼睛一样撩人地咬着那红润的下唇。他说：

“德隆嫂！为什么啦，你一见到我就逃？你……？”

梅春姐轻轻地把小水桶卸下了肩头，背转身来，低低地望着那水中的自己的阴影。她的面孔突然地红到耳根。她的心跳得快要冲出喉咙了。她不知所措地，忸怩地，颤声地回道：

“我——不认得……先生呀！……”

“不认得？我姓黄啦！……我是会中的副会长，我就在那大庙里教书的啦。你不是在草场中见过我的吗？……”

一阵风从梅春姐的侧面吹过来，把她那轻得使人听不出的回声拂走了。

“也许你忘记了！……不过，你为什么事情要怕我呢？”

“我没有怕先生。”

"Good. Then I'll pay you a visit one of these days. I'm a good friend of Brother Chen. I must come and see him when he comes back."

Only after Huang had strolled a long way off, swinging his switch, did Meichun heave a deep sigh and carry home her water.

After this, Huang came to her house often. Meichun could no longer fear him the way a mouse fears a cat. Although her husband was not at home and she did her best to prevent the neighbours from gossiping, Huang was very casual. Sometimes he came alone, sometimes with Wooden Image, sometimes with a bunch of young fellows from the association.

He often talked to her about women in a most enlightened way. Often he told her marvellous stories about them.

Meichun gradually grew confused. Her determination gradually weakened.

And so it was that a pretty tender little mouse landed lightly, quietly in the mouth of a cat.

It happened on a dark misty night.

Meichun was worrying about the vicious rumours spreading among her neighbours. For three nights she hadn't slept well. Her mind seemed shrouded in fog. She couldn't understand why people were dirtying her reputation. She hadn't done anything wrong. Meichun knew how to keep her respectability. She could resist the lures of evil men, she could control her emotions. But people just wouldn't understand her. They insisted on inventing nasty rumours. What's more, in the dark of night some of them even pa-

“没有怕？好的！那么，我就改一天到你家中来玩吧！我和德隆哥很好，他回来了，我一定要来看他的。……”

梅春姐一直等他舞着那条细长的鞭子，跑了好远好远了，才深深叹了一声，挑水回家去。

这之后，黄先生就常常要跑到梅春姐的家中来，梅春姐也就不能再像耗子怕猫般地那样怕他了。虽然是丈夫不在家，虽然她还时常提防着村邻们的物议，而他呢？有时候是一个人来，有时就带着麻子婶家的木头壳，和一些会中的小家伙。……

他还时时向梅春姐说着一些关于女人们的开通不过的话语，他还时时向梅春姐讲着一些关于女人们的新奇不过的故事。

梅春姐的脑子渐渐地糊里糊涂起来，梅春姐的决心渐渐地烟消云散了起来！……

于是，一头美丽、温柔的耗子，就这样轻轻、悄悄地，被抓到猫儿的口中。

六

这事情，就发生在一个黑暗的，苍茫的午夜。

梅春姐正为着一些村邻们的无谓的谣言而忧烦着，她已经整整地三宵不曾安静了。她的心里，就像一团迷雾般地朦胧起来。她想不清人们为什么要将她的声名说得那样难堪而污秽，她是实在不曾和人们有过什么卑微、下贱的行为的。她很能够矜持她自己。她可以排除邪恶的人们的诱惑，她可以抑制自家的奔放的感

trolled outside her walls, front and back, and listened. That really hurt and depressed her.

The countryside in the tenth lunar month that year was as cold as winter. Dying calls of the few remaining insects seeped through Meichun's window and penetrated her upset heart. Listlessly, she leaned against the window frame and watched as a light gust of wind blowing in through a crack in the wall puffed out the lamp. Tired, sleepy, she slowly eased herself into the dark cave of the bed.

A rustling, faint, crackling sound aroused her.

The window was gradually opening. A large black object was creeping, creeping in.

Meichun turned to ice. Her teeth chattered. She nearly cried out hoarsely.

The black object groped its way towards her. It was a man, dressed in a long gown, a very familiar-looking man. Meichun's panicky heart raced and leaped. She trembled like a mouse gripped in a cat's mouth.

"Frightened?" The man stroked her shoulder. Hot flame suffused her icy body. Shivering, she pushed him away.

"Huang... Huang," she whispered. "How can you...how can you...you...."

"Meichun, be calm. I don't ordinarily — "

"Speak more softly. You... ai ... you're going to ruin me...."

"It's all right. Times have changed. Don't be so upset."

She tore his hands away. She was nearly wooden with alarm.

情。而人们毕竟不能原谅她，毕竟要造谣污秽她，并且在夜深人静时，还常来壁前壁后偷盗般地梭巡她。这真是太使梅春姐感到抑郁而伤心的了。

十月的荒原，就像有严冬那样的冰寒了。很少有几声垂毙的虫们的哀叫，透过了小窗来，钻进到梅春姐的繁乱的心情里。她懒洋洋地靠着窗门，看那壁隙的微风将油灯轻轻吹灭。疲劳，困倦，……慢慢地，将她推到了那洞黑的床前。

一个嗦嗦嗦嗦的，低微的，剥啄的声音，把她惊悸了！

小窗门微微地启开着。一个黑色的，庞大的东西，慢慢地由窗口向里边爬！爬！……

梅春姐的全身都骇得冰凉了。她的牙门磕着！她几乎哑声地呼喊了起来！

黑色的东西摸到她的跟前了——是一个人。一个穿长袍子的，非常熟识的身材的人。梅春姐的心中慌忙着，击着，跳着……像耗子被抓到了猫儿口中般地颤栗起来！

"吓吗？……"那个人伸手摸着了她的肩头，——一股麻麻的火一般的热力，透过她的冰凉的身子。她嘶声地，抖战地推开他：

"黄，黄……你……你……唉！你……"

"我是……梅春姐，你，平静些吧！……我平常……"

"轻声些！……你……唉！……你不要害我的！……"

"不要紧的！……现时已经不比从前了！……你安静些吧！……"

Drenched in tears, she contracted into a tight ball, her heart pounding in confusion.

Huang again closed in on her like a wolf. She was no longer able to drive him off. Thinking of those listeners patrolling outside her walls, she tragically beseeched him:

"Go... go...out there... the grove by the vegetable garden. I'll meet you there...."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

Huang, like a nimble lizard, slipped out of the window.

It was so dark outside she couldn't see her hand before her face. Meichun's heart ached as though it was going to shatter. Pushing open the door, she walked unsteadily towards the left, where the grove was only dimly visible beside the vegetable garden.

"Heaven, should I go? This is terrible. Should I... should I?..."

Hesitant and frightened, she stood for a long time, unable to decide whether to break away from the proper path. The heat Huang had generated, burning into her agitated soul, leaped and tossed within her.

She was perplexed, worried, but her feet slowly, as if by some magic, moved along the overgrown path through the garden and brought her tottering like a mad woman to the edge of the grove.

What if a neighbour sees me?... Meichun halted, suddenly terrified, as if a huge abyss yawned before her. Pressing her hand to her heart, she stared around in the darkness. Then she plunged into the grove, her head spinning.

梅春姐挣扎地摆下他的手来，她为那过度的惊惶而痴呆着。她的被眼泪淋湿着的身子紧紧地缩成了一团，她的心里更加慌忙地冲击着！

黄，像一只狼般地再度地奔向她来，梅春姐已经无法能推开他了。为了那些壁前壁后的梭巡人的耳目，她幽幽地，悲抑地，向他哀求道：

“你去，……去！……那边……菜园，林子里，我来。……”

“真的吗？”

“真的！……”

黄，就像一只矫捷的壁虎般的，向窗门翻走了。

外边黑得伸手看不见自家的拳头，梅春姐的心就像快要被人家分裂般地徬徨，创痛着！她推开了里房门，向着左方，那菜园的看不清的林子里踌躇着：“天啦！这样的怕人啦，我去不去呢？我，我将？……”

她站在那里惊疑了好久好久，她还不能决断她的适当的行踪。黄遗留下来的热力，就像火一般地传到她的繁乱的心里，渐渐地翻腾了起来！

她犹疑，焦虑着！她的脚，会茫然地，慢慢地，像着魔般地不由她的主持了！它踏着那茅丛丛的园中的小路，它把她发疯般地高高低低地载向那林子边前！……

"假如我要遇见了邻人？……"她突然地惊惧着！她停住了，就好像已经在她的面前发现了一个万丈深长的山涧似的。她把头向周围的黑暗中张望一下，扪了一扪心，然后又昏昏沉沉地，奔到林子里去了。

一个黑黑的，突如其来的东西拖着她的手，她的全身痉挛着！

"这里！——"

"我，黄，……"

"不做声！——"

他轻轻将她搂抱起来，他紧紧地贴着她的脸！当他吻到了她的那干热的嘴唇的时候，便一切都消失在那无涯的黑暗和冷静的寒风中了！……

第三章

一

传言像一团污浊的浓雾般的，将全村迷漫着。

五七个妇人：黄瓜妈、麻子婶、柳大娘，还有两个年轻的闺女、小媳妇，又在湖滨的洗衣基石上碰头了。

她们曲曲折折地谈着这桩新奇的，暧昧的事情。

在她们的后面，有三个老头子：白发的四公公，烂眼睛的李六伯伯，和精神健壮的关胡子。他们在那坟堆上抽烟，谈世事，他们向着太阳扪老虱婆。

柳大娘的双颊涂得火一般地通红了，她也想叫会中的副会长和有资格的人们看上她。她妖媚地朝那三个老东西唾了一口，又开始谈起她那还不曾谈完的故事：

"老黄瓜，他说，……"

"说什么呀？下流的，不要脸的家伙！……"黄瓜妈气起来。

"他说，……哼！他还比我们下流百倍呢！"柳大娘冷声地笑道。"他还夜夜去梅春姐家的壁前壁后偷看他们的！……他说：'有一天，我伏在菜园的后边……'听呀，麻子婶！……'我

很小心地望着她家的窗子，一个黑色的东西向里边爬！爬！……随后，又爬出来了。随后又有一个跟在那个的后边，摸到菜园中的林子里来了。我专神地一看：哼！你说是谁啦？……就是——梅春姐和那有一双漂亮眼睛的黄！……'他说：'唔！是的，副会长！'……"

黄瓜妈的脸色气得发白了，麻子婶笑着。

"我要打死那下流的东西的！……"黄瓜妈的眼泪都气出来了。

在远方，在那大庙的会场那边，有一群人向这湖滨走来了。似乎有人在吵骂着，又似乎已经打了起来。

柳大娘用手遮着额头望着，她吃惊地竖起她的眉毛：

"麻子婶！你家的木头壳和老黄瓜打架啦！"

"打架？不会的！……"麻子婶应着，望着，"我家木头壳他很好！……"

打架的人渐渐地走了近来。

"该死的！……"麻子婶跳起来了。她是怎样地看见她的木头壳被老黄瓜踏在脚下挨拳头，又是怎样地看见人们将他们排解着！……

麻子婶连衣都不顾地跑上前去。欢喜看热闹的，洗衣的妇人们和坟堆上的老头子们也都围上来了。

“我要打死你这狗头壳的，你妈的！你给副会长拉皮条！我，我……”老黄瓜的小眼睛眣着，他连草香荷包都被震落下来了。“我明天就要上街去告诉陈灯笼的！……”

“我操你的妈妈！我给你的妈妈拉皮条呢！你看见了？……我操你的妈妈！……”木头壳将一颗血淋的牙齿吐在手里，他哭着，面孔就更加像木头刻出来的。“你自己吊不到膀子，你对你的祖宗发醋劲！操你的妈妈！……”

麻子婶冲过去，她拖着老黄瓜的手，不顾性命地咬将起来！黄瓜妈浑身战着，她夹在人们中间喊天，求菩萨！……

人们乌七八糟地围成一团了。

李六伯伯和四公公们从旁边长长地叹道：

“我们老早就说过了的！不得了的！女人们没有了头发要变的，世界要变的！……”

“变的？还早呢！……”关胡子摸着那几根灰白髭须，像蛮懂的神气，说，“厉害的变动还在后头啊！……”

“后头？……”四公公的心痛起来了，“走吧！没有什么东西好看的了！走！……”

三个人雁一般地伸着颈子，离开着那些混乱的人群，向村中蹒跚地走着！

A dark object grasped her hand. She started convulsively.

"In here."

"Huang, I — "

"Don't talk."

Lightly he wrapped her in his arms, pressing his face close to hers. He kissed her dry burning lips. Then everything dissolved into the limitless darkness and the icy wind.

Ⅲ

Unhappy, regretful, Meichun wept and didn't leave her door for several days. Huang hadn't appeared for three nights, and even if he did come he wouldn't have much to say. It was as if she had fallen into a deep dirty pit and could never wash herself clean. She knew what the whole village was saying about her. She knew also her own misery and the insoluble predicament she was in. And most of all she knew that those bulging crab eyes of her husband and the spear-head he had polished so gleaming bright would never forgive her.

She no longer seemed to have any command over her own body. It was as if she had been marked with a special label. She dared not go down to the lake to draw water.

She tried to hide. But she couldn't even do that.

Can I just let myself be ruined like this? she thought. No, I must make him find me a way out.

That night there was a bit of moonlight. As Meichun was about to blow out the lamp and get into bed, Wooden Image came run-

二

为着那痛苦的悔恨而哭泣，梅春姐整整地好些天不曾出头门。黄已经有三夜不来了，来时他也不曾和她说过多少话。就好像她已经陷入到一个深沉的，污秽的泥坑里了似的，她的身子，洗都洗不干净了。她知道全村的人都怎样地在议论她；她也知道自家的痛苦，陷入了如何的不能解脱的境地；她更知道丈夫的那双圆睁的眼睛和磨得发亮了的梭镖，是绝对不会饶她的！……

好像身子不是她自己的身子了，好像有人在她的身子上作过什么特殊的标记。她简直连挑水都不敢上湖滨。

她躲着。或者是：她连躲都躲不起来了。

“我就是这样地将自家毁掉吗！……但，不能呀！”她想着，“我总得要他和我想一个办法的！……”

这一夜，有一些些月亮。梅春姐还不曾吹灯上床，木头壳便跑来敲她的房门了。

ning up and knocked on her door.

His face was bruised and swollen. "Things look bad for you two," he said. "I had a fight with Cucumber today. He wants to go to the county town and tell Lantern Chen. The vice-chairman sent me to get you. He's waiting for you on the island."

"Why hasn't he come himself?"

"He can't."

"Heaven. . . ." Meichun's teeth began to chatter, her body alternately burned and froze. At the mention of Lantern Chen, her eyes went black. She could see that brightly gleaming spear and those red crab-like eyes.

Putting out the lamp, she followed Wooden Image unsteadily. Suddenly she halted and asked: "What if Cucumber follows us and catches us?"

"He can't. His ma has got him locked up," Wooden Image replied soothingly.

Hazy moonlight bathed the small waves on the lake. The water level seemed much lower. A little boat was moored on the muddy flats.

Wooden Image handed her aboard, shoved off with his knee, then jumped on. He poled the boat across the choppy lake towards the uninhabited island.

Meichun was watching the island as the small boat drew near. When she saw Huang's shadowy form standing among the reeds stubble, she stared at him furiously, as if she were longing to avenge the insult he had inflicted upon her. She was blinded by tears. Shame, remorse and joy consumed her.

他的脸肿了起来,青一块,紫一块。他说:“梅春姐!你们的事情很不好!我今天和老黄瓜打了起来!他要上街告诉陈德隆去。副会长叫我来,他在湖中的荒洲上等你!……”

“他怎么不来呢?”

“他不来!”

“天哪!……”梅春姐的牙齿磕了起来。她的身子一阵烧,一阵冷!提起了陈德隆,她的眼睛就发黑,她就看见那磨得放亮的梭镖和那通红的眼睛!……

熄了灯光。她一步高一步低地跟他走着。突然地,她站住了:

“假如老黄瓜他到这里来抓我们呢!……”

“不会的,老黄瓜给他的妈妈关起来了。”木头壳安她的心说。

湖水起着细细的波涛,溶浴在模糊的月光里。并且水岸好像已经退下了许多,将一条小船横浅在泥泞的倾坡上。

木头壳将梅春姐拉上船艘,自己用膝骨将船头推下了,便跳将上来,撑篙子,横切过那细细的波涛,向荒洲驶去。

梅春姐正正地凝注着那荒洲。小船也慢慢地离近了。当她看见了站在那割断了的芦苇根中的黄底阴影的时候,她便陡然地用了一种憎恨的,像欲报复着他给予她的侮辱一般的目光,向他牢牢地钉过一下!她的眼泪就开始将她的视线朦胧起来。羞耻,悔恨和欢欣,将她的全身燃烧着。

Huang came to the bank and helped her ashore. Wooden Image waited for them in the boat. They walked and walked, neither of them saying a word, their feet crunching on the stubble of the cut reeds.

At a fairly level clearing they halted. Huang asked:

"Are you cold? What are you going to do, Meichun? What do you propose?"

"Propose?" Meichun sounded ready to weep. She clutched his hand. "I don't dare go out the door. They've smeared my pure reputation with filth. They want to tell my husband."

Huang pulled her to sit down beside him. He gazed up at the icy sky. The ground smelled of rotted reeds and damp mud.

"But you," she said, "you're not willing to think of a way out for me. You haven't come for three days."

Huang heaved a long sigh. Playing with a reed root, he said irritatedly: "This place is too unenlightened. Mother's — Too backward. I simply can't get anything done here."

"What am I going to do?" dejectedly, tragically, Meichun cried.

"The Chairman is too weak. He pushes everything on to me. In an unenlightened village like this. Meichun, I want to leave."

"Leave? Where will you go?" Trembling, her throat constricting, she exclaimed: "He'll kill me with his spear — "

"No. We'll go together."

"Together? But where? Heaven above...."

"To district headquarters in town. I've already spoken to the general association."

黄走近岸边来拉起她了。木头壳就停着在小船中等他们。他们走着，走着，……不作声。脚踏着芦苇的根子，吱吱地响。

突然地，在一个比较平铺一点的芦苇根中，他们站住了。他说：

“冷吗？……梅春姐！怎么办啦？你的打算……”

“打算？……”梅春姐的声音就像要变成了眼泪般的，她紧紧地拉着他的手。“我简直不能出门！他们把我那一向都很清白的名誉，像用牛屎、糠头灰糊壁一般的，糊得一塌糊涂了。他们还要去告诉我的丈夫！……”

黄拉着她坐下来了，他昂头望着那片冷冰冰的夜天。在地上，发散着一种腐芦苇，和湿润的泥泞底气味。

“并且，你……”她说，“你也不肯替我想一个办法的，你三天都不来了！……”

黄长长地叹着，手里摸着一根芦苇根子，声音气起来：

“这地方太不开通了！他妈的！太黑暗了，简直什么都做不开。”

“怎么办呢！做不开！……”她沮丧地，悲哀地几乎哭起来了。

“会长太弱，什么都推在我一个人的身上，村中人又不开通！……梅春姐，我想走！……”

“走？你到哪里去呢！……”梅春姐战着，硬着她的喉咙：“我要被他的梭镖刺死啦！我，……”

“不，我想和你一同走！”

“一同走？到哪里去呢？我的天哪！……

"In town?"

"Yes. I think we ought to leave tomorrow. There's women's association there. You can join."

Meichun didn't answer. Covering her face with her hands she lowered her head.

"What's the matter? Are you weeping again?" Huang tossed away the root.

After a long time Meichun sighed deeply, then looked up at the night sky.

"Anyhow... ai... you've ruined me. The first time I saw you and those devilish eyes of yours — they shone in my heart just like those stars up there — see? Now, ai...if I don't leave... anyhow, I'm going with you. For better or worse, my fate is in your hands."

Huang hugged her head to his chest and caressed her gently. "Then I'll be waiting for you in the temple tomorrow afternoon," he said. "Come early. Just bring a change of clothing."

Before she could respond, from behind them Wooden Image called: "Aren't you finished yet? It's cold."

"All right then. Come early tomorrow," Huang repeated.

The moon had pushed into a bank of dark clouds. In the sky only a few frigid stars remained, sparkling like crystal.

Meichun was frightened and distressed. Couldn't she bear to leave her home? Or was she afraid of some impending calamity? When Wooden Image came and told her to be ready to leave at three she grew absolutely frantic.

“到镇上的区中去！我和总会里人说了的。”

“镇上?”

“是的！我想，明天就走。那里也有你们的会，你也可以去入会的。”

梅春姐不做声，她用手扪着脸，她的头低低地垂着。

“怎么，又哭吗?”他把手中的芦苇根子抛了。

半晌，她深深地叹着，将头仰向那上方的夜天：

“总之，唉！我是被你害了！……我初见你时，你那双鬼眼睛……你看：就像那星一般地照到我的心里。现在，唉！……我假如不同你走……总之，随你吧！横直我的命交了你的！……”

黄紧紧地抱过她的头来，他轻轻地抚摸着。他说：

“那么，你明天就早一些来罗！下午我在庙中等你，你只要带两身换洗的衣服。”

梅春姐还不及回他的话，在后方，木头壳叫了：

“你们还不走啦？冷哩！……”

“好，你就明天早些来吧！”他重复地说。

月亮已经拥入到一片墨云中了。在天空，只有几颗巨大的寒星，水晶般地频频地闪烁。

三

老黄瓜一夜不曾合眼睛，他恨恨地咬着牙齿。手上被麻子婶咬掉一块皮的地方还包扎着。房门锁了，后门锁了，连窗门都加了一个反闩。母亲还是足足地骂了他一更天才睡着。

他睁着小眼睛望着黑暗，他的脑筋里想起了一切挖苦人，侮辱人，激怒人的话；他是想用这些话到街上去激动那癞子陈灯笼的。并且他还想好了如何避免陈灯笼疑心他吃醋，如何才能够使陈灯笼看出他的那真正的同情心和帮忙心来。

天还只有一丝丝亮，他就爬起来了。偷儿般地将房门扳了一下，扳不开！小窗门牢牢地反闩着。他用了全身的吃奶子的力，将窗栏杆敲折一块，反手将窗门撬开，爬出去。

初冬的早晨的寒气，像一根坚硬而波动的铁丝般的，钻着他的身子，他的全身起着一层鸡皮疙瘩。他用脏污的袖子揩了一揩干枯的眼粪，拔着腿子向街上飞奔！

十多里路，他连停都不停地一口气跑到了。

不是醋劲，是真正的同情心和帮忙心！

陈德隆的样子很难看，是吃不住营中的苦呢！还是挂记着家中的妻子呢！当老黄瓜费了很大的功夫问到他的营前的时候，他就那么闷闷地非常不安。他肩着一根梭镖，和另一个背洋枪的人站在营门口。

老黄瓜老远地打着唿哨，招呼着陈灯笼，他不敢冒然地冲到营门去。

"你吗，老黄瓜？"陈德隆吃惊地睁着他的螃蟹眼，和那背洋枪的说了一些什么话，就飞一般跑来了。他头上的一顶蓝帽子几乎压倒了眉毛。"上街来做什么呢？"

"不做什么，专门来看看你的！"老黄瓜态度悠闲地说。

"看看我？"

"是的！"

"唉！老黄瓜！……"陈德隆阴郁起来。"妈的！真吃苦，没有酒，没有烟！还天天操练！……我总想销了差回家来！……"

"回家来？…"老黄瓜微微地笑着，"我看你还是在这里的好些呢！有吃，有穿！……"

"吃，妈的，糙米饭！穿？罗，就是这样的粗布！"

"好！"老黄瓜更进一步地笑着，微微地露出点儿意思来。"衣裳很好，不过帽子的颜色还深了点儿！"

"怎么？"

"没有怎么！"他阴险地，照着他的预定的计划又进一层地挖苦着，"顶好还再绿一点儿！"

陈德隆的眼睛突然地瞪得通红了，就好像

两枝火箭般地直射着老黄瓜。他的声音急着，战着：

“我的老婆偷人吗？……”

“没有！……”老黄瓜不紧不松地，他想把那牛一般的陈灯笼再深深地激怒一下，“她只和会中副会长黄有一点儿小小的往来，那不能算她的过错……”

“真的么？”

“假的！——”

忽然间，老黄瓜觉得他的一切计划都已经逐步通行了，便立时庄重了他的脸膛，满是同情心地说：

“我看你还是快些回家吧！哼！……那狗入的木头壳给他们拉皮条。那鬼眼睛的副会长，还兴高采烈地在村中穿来穿去！……是我实在替你不平了，才和他们打起来的！罗，你看：这只手！……我今天一早上就爬了起来！……”

陈德隆的脸青一阵，白一阵，他呆呆地望着那高处，……那不可及的云片和火一般的太阳光。随即他又低下来了。他把梭镖使力地插在坚硬的地上，约半尺来深。他将它摇着，摇着！……一会儿又抽出来，一会儿又重新插起了，就好像要试试那梭镖能插人插得多深的一般。他的牙齿像在嚼着一把什么大砂子，喳喳地响着！一会儿他又向地上疯狂地吐起唾沫来，一会儿他又笑着！……

老黄瓜觉得陈德隆已经是怎样地怒得不可开交了，并且庆幸自家的心思已经完全达到。

连那个老远地背着洋枪的人，都不知道陈德隆在玩些什么鬼！

突然地，陈德隆像一匹熊般地向老黄瓜冲去！猛不提防地在他的颊上批一下！——

“去罢！老子明白，妈的，你也不是好家伙！……”

老黄瓜满怀的冤枉。他是很知道陈灯笼有一把蛮力的，他不敢再吃眼前亏地飞奔着。一面恨恨地朝陈灯笼抛来两句遮羞的，报复般的话：

“不信吗？我操你的妈妈！狗咬吕洞宾，不识好人心！你这鬼癞子总有一天会晓得你祖宗的好意的！”

午饭的号声吹了，陈德隆打定了主意，提着梭镖，匆匆地走着。在营门口，已经又有了新来替代他们的岗位的人。

"Heaven, what shall I do? What shall I do, Heaven...."

She scrabbled through a dilapidated trunk and brought out all of her mildewed old clothes. She rummaged around both ends of the bed. Actually, she didn't know what she was looking for.

"Heaven, what shall I do?"

The bed, the floor, were covered with old clothes. Again Wooden Image came and urged her to hurry. It was already well after three.

She threw a few things together and tied them into a small bundle. Then she ran to the shed and fed the thin undernourished ox. Next she went to the coop and tended the chickens. Sorrowfully she bid farewell to her kitchen, her vegetable garden, her household utensils, her farm implements.

Her bundle was heavy, her footsteps dragged, her head hung low. At the gate suddenly her husband appeared, his round crab-like eyes flashing red, his scabby head hot and steaming, a cold cruel smile on his swollen face.

Meichun shook from head to toe. Because Lantern had been running he stank of sweat and dust. Meichun dropped her bundle.

Assuming a benign air, Lantern bent and picked it up.

"Going to visit your family? I've come back especially to see you off. First make me a little something to eat. Then we'll go together."

Like a chick seized by a hawk, Meichun tremblingly returned to the house in the grip of his thick black talons. He sat down on a stool and idly played with a piece of mildewed clothing he picked up from the floor. He instructed Meichun to cook him some food.

四

梅春姐满怀着恐怖与悲伤。是舍不得离开家中呢？还是惧怕着什么灾祸的来临呢？当木头壳跑来通知她三点钟就要起行的时候，她简直慌的手忙脚乱了。

"天啦！我怎么的好呢？怎么好呢？天啦！……"

她伸手到破箱子里去摸，霉陈腐旧的衣裳统统摸出来了。她在床前头翻了一阵，床后头又翻了一阵，她实在不知她应该翻些什么东西。

"天啦！我怎么好呢？……"

满床的旧衣服，满地的旧衣服。木头壳又跑来催他了：三点钟过了好些分钟。

她胡乱地包成一个小包袱。她跑到牛栏去瞧了一瞧那条饿瘦的牛，又跑到鸡笼去将鸡招呼一下，厨房、菜园、家用品和家具——满腔的酸泪与惜别的悲哀！

衣包重，脚步重，头低低地垂着！……在门口，突然而来地——丈夫的一双圆睁的螃蟹形的眼睛放着红光！一个冒着热气的癞痢头！一副膨胀的面庞和冷冰冰的凶狞的微笑！……

梅春姐的全身发着抖。一股难堪的，因他的奔跑而生的汗臭和灰泥臭，直扑到她的鼻孔中来。衣包被震落在地下！

丈夫装得非常和蔼的靠近她的身边，他弯腰拾起她的包袱。

"回娘家吗？我特别跑回送你的行的！……来啦！先烧点儿东西我吃了，我们再去吧！……"

Outside it was quite dark. Had twilight come already? Or was it going to rain? Or were her eyes turning dim? Meichun stole a glance at her husband, who was drinking the rice gruel she had made him. She felt enveloped in a cloud. The room, the kitchen, everything was revolving. Barely able to stand, she shivered violently.

When Wooden Image arrived to hurry her for the third time, he saw Lantern's profile and ran.

Lantern rose, wiped his mouth and walked up to her. She shrank trembling like a lamb before a wolf.

"And now, 'virtuous wife,' tell me," he said. "Since your mother and your whole family are dead, what made you suddenly want to go home to see them?"

Meichun, protecting her head with her arms, contracted her body. She didn't utter a sound, not a sound. Suddenly — she saw Lantern raising a bear-like paw — suddenly he struck. Her head hit the door with the force of a sledge hammer. Her eyes went black. Twisting like a screw, she fell to the floor.

The whole world was crushing her like a mountain. Thunder boomed in her ears.

Lantern punched her chest a few more heavy blows.

She lay there five minutes, ten, perhaps longer. Finally she revived. Her whole body was searing with pain, her head was splittingly dizzy. A moist sticky substance was clotting on her battered skull.

There seemed to be noisy voices in the living room, though she couldn't hear very clearly. She couldn't see, but she knew that her

就像一头老鹰抓一只小鸡般的，梅春姐在他粗黑的手中战栗着——轻轻地被抓到了房中。他坐在一张小凳子上面，失神地玩弄着一件由地上捡上来的霉污的衣服，吩咐着梅春姐给他烧点吃的东西。

外边非常阴暗。是黄昏的到来呢？是要下雨呢？还是梅春姐眼睛放花呢？……她偷偷地看着陈德隆喝着她烧给他的米汤饭，就好像在云里雾里的一般。她看着全屋子，全厨房，都团团地旋转着！她不能支持地战栗了好几阵！

木头壳第三次来催她时，只看到陈德隆的半边脑袋就飞逃了。

他站起身来，揩了一揩嘴边的残液，走近到她的畏缩的，像一头小羊遇见狼般的战栗的身子。

"现在，"他说，"'贤德的妇人'！告诉我吧！你的娘家的人都死尽了，你为什么又突然想起要回娘家的呢？……"

梅春姐用手防护着头，紧紧地缩着她的身子。她不作声，不作声！……突然地——她是怎样地看见陈德隆举起一只熊掌般的大手，猛然地向她击去！她的头，像一只沉重的铁锤般地碰在门上。她的眼睛发着黑，身子像螺丝钉似地旋了一个圈圈，倒在地上！

整个的世界山一般地压着她！耳边的雷声轰轰地响着！

陈德隆又继续在她的胸前加擂了几下！

她躺着，躺着！……五分钟，十分钟。不，也许还久长一点。她终于苏醒了来。她的身子

husband was cursing and fighting with men from the peasant association. People were raising her and placing her on a cool wooden stretcher. It swayed — she was moving. Even after she had gone a long distance across the plain, she could still faintly hear her husband's mad hoarse bellows.

"...I'll complain about you at district headquarters. I'll tell the general association. What right have you to take her away?..."

The chairman of the district headquarters of the peasant association was a robust, kindly man. He had burning eyes and high cheek-bones, and there was a clarion ring to his voice. A warm smile hung upon his full lips.

"What, exactly, do you want to do?" he said, patting the shoulder of Lantern Chen, who was ranting like a mad bull. "Your wife's affairs are out of our hands. If you want her back, I'll take you to the women's association."

"Let's go then. Mother's — I've nothing to be afraid of. I'll have it out with them."

"You won't win, though," the chairman warned. "There's not much justice on your side."

"What justice do they have? I'm not afraid of them."

"All right, then. Let's go."

Chen often came to town. But today the place seemed strange. He gazed at the houses that lined the streets, at the people coming and going. They all looked different. They appeared to be swaying, to be mocking him nastily, unbearably.

"Heh-heh. Tortoise. Cuckold."

像置放在烈火中燃烧般地痛疼着！她的脑袋，像炸裂般地昏沉起来！一块湿湿的膏糊般的流汁，渐渐地凝固着她那青肿了的头颅。

仿佛，她还能听得清楚：堂屋中满是嘈杂的人声。丈夫是怎样地在和会中人家吵骂着，又怎样地和人家打了起来，她不能看。她的身子，不知道被什么人抬起来，放置在一块冰凉的木板上。随后又轻轻地摇摆着，走着！……一直到荒原中好远好远了，丈夫的那疯狂得发哑的，不断和人家的争闹，还可以清清晰晰地传到那伤坏的梅春姐的耳中。

"……我要到区中去告你们的！……我要到总会中去告你们的！你们将她抬走！……我操你们的八百代！……"

五

区中的正会长，是一个十分壮健而和蔼的人。他有两只炯炯光光的眼，和一双高高的颧骨。他说起话来，声音响亮。一副非常亲切的笑容，挂在他的那宽厚的嘴唇上。

"你到底怎样呢？"他说。一面用手拍拍那愤慨得像疯牛一般了的陈德隆。"现在，关于你老婆的事情，我们是不能管的，你要找回她，我就带你到她们的会中去！……"

"去，妈的！"陈德隆叫道，"我是什么都不怕的，我非和她们拚拚不可！"

"你不会赢的！"正会长又真心地劝道，"你的理少！……"

"她们的理在哪里呢？我不怕她们！"

"Heh-heh. Can't even control your own wife. Always acting so tough. Dumb clod."

Rage flamed in his chest. Beads of fine sweat rolled from his forehead. He didn't feel as if he were walking down a cold street on a winter's day. It was more like the open plain in summer beneath a blazing sun. He was hot, hot....

Lantern was a man who never gave ground to anyone. In the village he was known for his wilfulness. But today this matter was about to snuff out his prestige of a lifetime. Tightly he clenched fists that were like hairy crab claws, seething inwardly.

"I must have it out with them. Who's afraid of those women? I'm going to find her and stab her to death. I'm going to catch him and gouge out those pretty eyes. And that women's association won't be able to do a thing about it."

The chairman halted outside the door of a temple. Again he smiled warmly.

"You wait here," he said. I'll see if anyone in authority is around."

Chen glared at the door and at the long wooden signboard hanging beside it. He recognized the words written on the sign. He read them again and again.

An old woman came out and led him to a room that formerly housed idols.

The chairman and a pretty young woman with curly hair were seated there. Other women with hair cropped short in various fashions stood watching on both sides.

"Is your name Chen?" the pretty woman asked. Her hair curled

"好,走吧!"

镇上,陈德隆是常常到的。但今天,他似乎觉得生疏起来了。他看看那些街旁的房屋,他看着那些来来往往的人群,都似乎与平常不同了,都似乎已经摇晃起来了,都似乎在对他作一种难堪的,不可容忍的深深的嘲讽。

"嘿嘿!你这乌龟!"

"嘿嘿!你连老婆管不了的,假装刚强的,愚笨的家伙!"

陈德隆的心火一阵阵地冒上来,头上直流着细细的汗珠子。他觉得他走的不是冬季的,冷冰冰的街道,而是六月的,布满了火一般的太阳光的荒原!他热,热!……

他是什么事情都不曾落过人家的下风的。在村中,他是唯一有名的刚强的男子。而目前,他半世的威风,眼瞪瞪地就要丧在这一回事情的里面了。他紧紧地捏着他那毛蟹爪般的拳头,他的心中频频地冲击着。

"我非和她们拚拚不可!我不怕她们的!我寻着她,刺死她!寻着他,挖出他的那双漂亮的眼睛!我看她们将我怎么办?……"

正会长在一个庙门前头停住着。他又露了一露他那非常亲切的笑容。

"现在,你站在这里!"他说,"我看她们里面有没有主持的人来?"

陈德隆牢牢地钉着庙门,钉着那挂着的长长的木板。那木板上面的字,他都能认识,他将它念了无数遍。

一个老妈妈跑出来,将他带到一个从前供菩萨的殿堂里。

like the tendrils of a vine.

"That's right," Chen replied. Irrepressible rage flamed within him. He stared at the women with furious red eyes.

The pretty woman's pink face hardened. "What have you come for?"

"I want my wife."

"Your wife? Don't you know our laws?"

"No. She's slept with another man and made me lose face. I want to take her home and chastise her."

"You do, eh? And that's without knowing our laws. If you knew them you'd probably want to bury her alive. After beating her up so badly you still have the nerve to come here — "

"She's my wife," Chen interrupted.

"That has nothing to do with it," the young woman replied, rising angrily. "Now you listen to me. Your wife is in love with another man. She's told us that herself. But you've no right to beat and torment her. Our laws forbid it. We'll forgive you this time, because you didn't know. Now, go. She's not your wife any longer. She's one of us. After we've nursed her back to health, we'll send her home."

"Really?"

"Really."

"What if I kill her?"

"Just try. We'll skin you alive."

"Good."

Without another word, Chen turned and left. He plodded heavily down the steps, grinding his teeth, his eyes glowing a horrible

正会长和一个青年的，卷发的，漂亮的女人坐在那里。另一群也是短发的，剪成各种各式的头样的妇人，在她们的两边围观着。

"你叫陈德隆吗？"那漂亮的女人问。她的头发卷得像一丛小勾藤似的。

"是！"陈德隆应着。他的心火不能按耐地燃烧了好几次。他瞪着那通红的眼珠子，死死地钉着她们。

"告诉我，陈德隆！"那漂亮女人板起了她的粉红的面孔，又问："现在，你跑来做什么呢？"

"不做什么，我要我的老婆的。"

"你要你的老婆？……你懂得我们这里规章吗？"

"不懂得！……她偷了人，丢了我的脸，我是要将她领回教训的。"

"好！幸亏你还不懂得。你要懂得了时，你还会将她活埋掉呢！你把她打的头浮眼肿了，你还来……"

"她是我的老婆啦！"陈德隆截断了她的话头叫着。

"别提她是你的老婆吧！"那女人气冲冲地站起来了，"告诉你！你的老婆爱上了旁的人了，这是她自己说的。我们这里的规章是这样：女人爱谁就同谁住。并且还不能打她，骂她，折磨她！……前晚的事情，我们饶了你，是因为你不懂得。现在，你去吧！她已经不是你的老婆了。她是我们这里的人了。她在我们这里养伤，养好了我们自己教她回去。"

"真的吗？"

"真的！"

“我要是将她杀了呢!”

“你敢？我们抓到了剥你的皮!”

“好!”

陈德隆一言不发,回转身子就走。他的脚步沉重地踏着台阶,他的牙齿喳喳响着,他的眼睛里放着那可怕的红光!

在后面,妇人们都哈哈大笑起来了！正会长老远老远地追着他,叫他的名字:

“陈德隆——陈德隆——”

他不回头,也不响,脚步更加使力地走着。过了街口,过了桥头,他的耳朵什么声音都听不见。

在堤前,他坐下了。

他定神地看着天,看着地,看着那土地庙旁边的一截枯腐了的白杨树的身干……

突然地,他走过去,使力的一拳——把白杨身干打穿一个大洞!

六

老黄瓜很扫兴。副会长走了,梅春姐走了,而陈灯笼又不肯将他当知心人看待。他去找陈灯笼几次,陈灯笼都不在家。就连那野婆娘们的家中都不去了。

“妈的！真倒运!”

今天,他听说陈灯笼回来了,并且在找人卖牛,卖鸡,卖家中的用品和农具;他特地跑来看他的。

陈灯笼满脸笑容地在打衣包。他说：

“来，朋友！晚间到我家中来喝酒吧！我要出门啦！……”

“出门？”

“嗳。”

“还有谁来呢？”

“不，就是我们两个人，喝杯米酒。”

“好的！好的！”老黄瓜走了几步，心里想道：“不错，妈的！还是好朋友，还是知心的人！不请旁人，单请我！……”

夜间——

陈灯笼把小桌子架在堂屋中间，点着小油灯，一缸酒，五大碗热烘烘的鸡肉。

老黄瓜奇怪起来：

“陈灯笼，你为什么弄这多的鸡肉呢？”

“卖不脱，自己杀了它。来，我们喝酒吧！”陈灯笼斟给他一大杯酒。

“你到哪里去呢？”

“做生意去！……不多谈它，喝酒吧！”

老黄瓜的心里更加奇怪起来。他看看陈灯笼好像并不是在喝酒，而是在喝一大碗一大碗的冷茶。吃鸡，好像连骨子都不愿意吐般地横吞着。他的光头上的青筋凸着！他的眼睛里放着血红血红的红光！……

“嗳！这又是一回怎样的事情呢？嗳！……”老黄瓜一边嚼着鸡肉一边想。

只在一刻刻功夫中，一缸酒已经只剩了一点儿边边了。

老黄瓜的视线模模糊糊起来。他是很不会喝酒的人，他给陈灯笼三杯五杯地，便灌得熏熏大醉了。

然而，一件心事，那就像一股不能抑制的蒸气般的，跟着米酒的冲力而翻腾上来了。

“陈灯笼！”

“怎么？”

“她，……她们呢？……”他更加模模糊糊起来。小灯光变成无数团火花飞动着。

“谁呀？”

“梅——梅春姐……和黄？——”

“管她呢，老黄瓜！”陈灯笼似乎在笑着，“男子汉，大丈夫，老婆只能当洗脚水，泼了一盆又来一盆！随她们吧，老黄瓜！……”

“对的，对……的！……”老黄瓜的身子渐渐地倒下来了。“陈——灯——笼！……你的蛮……蛮……对！……”

陈德隆站起身来。

“怎么，老黄瓜？……”他走来将他的身子踢了一脚，就像踢着一团烂棉花般的，老黄瓜滚到门弯中去了。

陈德隆用了一种迅速的，矫猿般的动作，将桌子轻轻搬开，将那磨得发亮的梭镖，从床头取出。将梭镖头拔下，用纸张包好，插在胸襟内。又将梭镖棍子当扁担，挑起了衣包来，开开门，向荒原中走去！……

银霜散布着夜的荒原。像那哭丧似的，哀叫的虫声，几乎完全绝踪了。月亮圆滑地从云围溜过，星星环绕在那泛滥的天河旁边，频频地眣眼。

陈德隆踏着大步地向镇上奔来。寒气掀起了他的酒意，使他更加倔强而凶猛了。一种沉重的杀机涌上他的心头。他的牙齿切得喳喳地响了！好像那黄的星一般的眼睛，好像那老婆的变节的身子与剪发的头颅，就停在他的前面般的，放出来一团团烈火，将他的灵魂燃烧着！

完全沉没在夜的风寒中的街镇，展向他的面前了。他在那桥头前停了一停，均匀了一回心头的喘息，酒意朦胧地，就开始进到街中了。他找寻她们的方向。

一道矮矮的垣墙，把一个狭巷中的低低的平屋包围了。陈德隆在那里停着。为了避免偶然的夜路人的碰见，他躲在墙角弯中，取出梭镖头来插上，将衣包就塞在那弯弯里。然后便跃身翻过矮墙来，在月明的光辉下轻轻地向着那第三个窗门爬去！……

"不会错的！"他抑制着他的朦胧的酒意，坚持他自己。他用梭镖头将窗子撬开，向里边爬着！……是他过于性急呢？还是黑暗中看不分明呢？当他使力的将梭镖向白色的床前一刺！就只听得到：喳——喳——

"哎呀！"

red.

The women laughed. The chairman of the peasant association, far behind, pursued him, calling his name.

But Chen didn't look back or answer. He increased his stride. Chen passed the intersection, crossed the bridge. His ears heard nothing.

At the dyke, he sat down.

Taking a grip on himself, he stared at the sky, at the ground, at the trunk of a withered white poplar beside the Temple of Earth.

Suddenly he walked over to the tree and punched a big hole in its rotted trunk with a blow of his fist.

IV

Meichun was extremely happy when she returned to the village. She and Huang went back under orders together. It was after she heard that Lantern Chen, intending to kill them, had murdered someone else by mistake and had to flee, that she thought of returning. She still had to wait several days because her wounds were not entirely healed.

She was very pleased. She had learned many things from the pretty chairman of the women's association in town. Meichun didn't return to her old house. She and Huang moved into a new building beside the temple. Nor did she go back to see her former home. She no longer missed her household utensils, her chickens, her ox and farm tools.

She was not afraid of rumours any more, nor did she hide in the

一声粗暴的喊叫，将他的梭镖头，震落到窗门里了！随后，他便只身如飞一般地跳出垣墙！偷偷地听着！

显然地，里面嘈杂的人声，完全不是！他气的提着衣包飞跑着！他的酒意，完全清醒过来了。

“唉，妈的！我怎么弄错的呢？我费了三天功夫才打听出她们来啦……唉！我到哪去呢？……她妈的，妈的！……唉！”

第四章

一

梅春姐非常幸福地又回到村中来了：她是奉了命令同黄一道回的。当她在镇上听到那癞子陈德隆，因要杀他们却错杀了旁人而逃跑的时候，她就想要回来的。因为她的伤还不曾全好，才迟了几日。

她非常高兴，她从镇上的漂亮的女会长那里，学到了很多东西。她没有再住从前的那所旧房子了。她是和黄同住在大庙旁边的另一个新房子里的。她不曾再回来看过她的老家，她也不再悬念她家中的用品，鸡、牛和农具！……

她不再怕人们的谣言了，她也不再躲在家

house. Meichun seemed to have become completely another person. She was busy in the village all day long. She learned to speak modern enlightened language. She learned to relate miraculous thrilling tales.

The girls, the women, all grew fond of her. They became quite chummy. But the old folks were jealous. They despised her, and kept their distance.

Whenever she met anyone she would announce that she was organizing a village women's association, just like the one the men had. Women ought to stand on their own feet now and work alongside of the men. They couldn't be dependent on the men for ever. And the men had no right to abuse, beat or torment them — as Lantern had tormented her. Women were human too, after all. From now on women were going to be "emancipated." They would make up their own minds about marriage and about marrying again. In these matters men had absolutely no right to use pressure or force... Meichun said she heard that some women were concealing the fact they still had long hair. All such tresses would be cropped. As to child brides, no one was to abuse them. Especially prohibited was the practice of foot-binding and compelling a woman whose husband had died to remain a perpetual widow.

These ideas Meichun was now able to express forcefully in neat modern phrases. The result was that the old men and women who formerly spoke so highly of her now thought her queer. Their jealousy and scorn turned gradually into hatred.

The whole thing was strange, they felt, absolutely weird.

The old women said angrily: "Fine laws she wants. They're

中不敢出来了。她似乎完全变成了另外一个人。她整天都在村子里奔波着：她学着，说着一些时髦的，开通的话语，她学着，讲着一些新奇的，好听的故事。

姑娘们，妇人们，都开始欢喜她，同她亲近了。老头子，老太婆们，都开始嫉妒她，卑鄙她，同她疏远了。

当她一遇见了人时，她就说：她也要在村子里组织一个什么女人们的会了，那会完全是和男人们的会一样的。因为女人在这个时候通统应当自立起来，和男人们共同作事的原故。女人是不能一世都依靠男人们的。而且，男人们也不能够无理地欺侮女人，打女人和折磨女人——就像陈灯笼过去折磨她的那样——因为女人和男人们一样地都是人啦！……并且女人们从今以后，通统要"自由"起来：出嫁、改嫁都要由自己作主，男人是决不能在这方面来压制和强迫女人们的！……女人们还偷着，留着没有剪掉头发的，限时通统要剪掉！……村子里不准任何人再折磨"细媳妇"①！而且尤其是不准"包细脚"和逼着死掉了丈夫的女人们做寡妇！……

这些话，梅春姐通统能说得非常的时髦、漂亮和有力量。因此那班从前都赞誉过她的老头子和老太婆们，就格外地觉得希奇，嫉妒，卑视而且渐渐地痛恨起梅春姐来了。

这真是一件希奇的，鬼气的事情啦！……

① "细媳妇"即"童养媳"。——原注

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evil, evil. Pure women shun such wicked blandishments."

The old men fumed: "Fine laws she wants. I said it a long time ago — when women cut their hair they change, the whole world changes."

But the reaction of the girls and young women was just the opposite. Most of them were overjoyed. They believed Meichun entirely. They became happy, vivacious. She had only to call on some family and she was immediately surrounded by women who approved and were eager to join her association. They hoped she would start it quickly.

To the old folks this was infuriating, nauseating. What was the world coming to? Many old people — like Grandpa Four and Cucumber's Ma — were ready to yell with fury.

But Meichun grew more cheerily active by the day. In the evening as she wearily returned from her labours, she and Huang went home together. Like a tender fledgling bird in spring, she was intoxicated by the fires he roused within her. Carefree, fearless, she savoured the happiness of their love. They cherished and helped each other. They offered mutual encouragement and solace.

Huang taught her how to read and write a little, and many new and amusing things. Meichun adored him. She tended him with a fanatic devotion.

In the mornings they went their separate ways to do their respective jobs.

Meichun often thought to herself: This is really living.

The women's association was finally organized. But there were

老太婆们都气着说：

“这样的规矩呵！——鬼哪！鬼哪！……贞节的妇人怕缠魂鬼哪！……”

老头子们都怄着说：

“这样的规矩啊！——我早就说过的哪！女人没有了头发要变的，世界要变的哪！……”

可是，那些年轻的姑娘和妇人们却恰恰相反，她们大半都像疯了似的，全都相信了梅春姐的话，心里乐起来了，活动起来了！只等梅春姐一到村子里的某一个人家，她们就成群结队地将她包围着。她们都愿意加入和赞成梅春姐的这一个会，并且还希望梅春姐能把这一个会早些日子成立起来！……

这真是一件气人的，怄人的事情啊！……世界还到底要变成一个怎样的东西呢？……很多老头子——像四公公他们，和老太婆——像黄瓜妈她们，都几乎要气得发叫起来了。

然而，梅春姐在村子里一天比一天更高兴地活动着。并且夜间，当她疲倦地从外面奔回家来的时候，她的黄也同时回来了。她便像一头温柔的，春天的小鸟儿般的，沉醉在被黄煽起来的炽热的情火里；无忧愁，无恐惧地饮着她自己青春的幸福！他们能互相亲爱，提携；互相规勉，嘉慰！……

黄还时常教她读一些书，写一点字；叫她做一些新鲜的，有意思的玩意。她也更加地爱护他，甚至于连一根毫毛都怕他伤坏。

白天，他们又各自分头地，在村子里做各人的事情！

她常常地想：这才是真正的生活呢。

当她的女人会开过第一次筹备会的一天的早上，忽然的，她对黄说：

“黄，我……”

“怎样啦？”

“我想是……有……有了什么……”她羞惭地将头儿低下。

“嗳哈！……不开通！不开通！”黄笑着说，并且急急地扶起她的头来：“是陈灯笼的吗？……”

“不，你的！”她把他的眼睛指着。“是你这双鬼眼睛的！星眼睛的！……”

黄扪着他的眼睛笑起来：

“随他吧！我的好，他的也好，都是一样的。只要有人能生养就得啦！我们的大事情还要紧得很哩！姐！……”

梅春姐还是不依地，娇羞地，狠狠地将他的眼睛钉着。

“唉，你的这双鬼眼睛！真撩人啊！……”

二

那个最欢喜搽脸红的，平常总是同情而又嫉妒梅春姐的放荡的妇人柳大娘，也开始变得和梅春姐一样了。她也学着说起开通的，时髦的话来了，学着讲起新奇的，好听的故事来了。那是因为梅春姐所邀集的女人们自己的会，在三月八日那天正式成立时，柳大娘也当选了会中干事的原故。

她奉了会长梅春姐的命令和指示，也开始日夜不停地在村子里奔波起来了。她的话虽然说不到梅春姐那么漂亮，有力，可是，如果按照梅春姐和一些其他的会中人的吩咐，一句一句地说出去，也是很能打动一些闺女和妇人们的心的。因此那班守旧的老头子和老太婆们见了她，就比见了梅春姐还痛恨得厉害。

"呸！……那是怎样的东西呢？……完全，……下流货呀！……鬼婆子，你还要学她吗？……"

"现在，无论谁啦！——如果再叫那个脸上涂得像猴子屁股的骚货进门，我一定要打断她的腿！……"

可是，柳大娘不比梅春姐，她却丝毫没有畏惧，仍然是高兴地，大胆地搽着脸红，在村子里的许多人家穿进穿出。她要是遇见了那些特别顽固和守旧的老头子、老太婆们，她就格外地觉得起劲了，因为她很能够抓到和指出他们的丑恶和错处来，给他们一个无情的回骂或威吓的原故。

"你们还装什么假正经呢？公公，伯，叔，婶婶！……你们的闺女和寡妇，不也是一样地在家里偷人吗？……你们为什么不把她们明白地嫁掉呢？……你们还偷着留着头发在头上有什么用处呢？……你们都应该晓得——现时不像

从前了呀！……一切——女人和男人家都应当‘平等’,‘自由’。……你们都以为大家通统是聋子和瞎子吗？……你们一天到晚守在家里逼寡妇！折磨‘细媳妇’！……强着给小女儿‘包细脚’！……这都是罪过的和犯法的事情呀！……你们通统都不懂得吗？……你们都想戴高帽子‘游乡’[①],吃官司和坐班房了吗？……哼！……我并不是梅春姐会长啦！你们还有心暗中来笑我,骂我哩！……”

这真是太气人的、怄人的事情啊！……但是谁还能大胆地当面回骂一句不赞成或反对的话呢？因为这世界完全变了样子了呀！你假如要骂——那你就要算作反动或不动的人了,并且立刻就有坐班房和“游乡”的危险的。因此,每当梅春姐,柳大娘,或者一些其他的女会中人来村子里宣传的时候,顽固的人家,就只好一面将闺女和“细媳妇”们收藏起来,一面仍然狠狠地在肚子里用小舌头骂着,怀疑着：

“妈的！怎样呢？世界到底要变成一个怎样的东西呢？”

“女人真的能和男人家‘平等’吗？……能当权吗？……不依规矩能和男人一起睡觉吗？……”

“寡妇能再嫁吗？……女儿能分家产吗？……”

“剪掉头发了,不‘包细脚’,还像一个女人吗？……”

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① “游乡”即是用绳子绑着在乡下游行示众。——原注。

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"嗯！他妈的！……盘古开天以来，就没有听见过这样的规矩！……这都是她们那些下贱的东西自己造出来的啦！……"

"操她们的妈妈！一个老法宝——不让她们进屋！"

"她们会自己塌下来的！放心吧！……"

可是，无论他们这些顽固的人是怎样在怀疑、暗骂和反对，女人们的会在村子里底势力，是一天一天地扩大起来了。她们不但没有"自己塌下来"，而且反将那些被收藏的闺女和"细媳妇"们，通统弄出来加入了她们的会。

这真是太气人的、怄人的事情啊！老头子和老太婆们的心血都差不多要气出来、呕出来了！——他们或她们还能对这样的事情生什么办法呢？假如真的是鬼入到女人们的心里了，谁还敢去阻拦她们呢？……当柳大娘和其他的女会中人，一次比一次得意地在村子里摇来摆去的时候，他们简直连胆都要气破了啊！

"妈的！……通统揍死她们吧！——只要她们自己塌下来！……"

可是，什么时候才能"塌下来"呢？——他们却不知道。

many questions they couldn't solve. Meichun would frequently be standing at the door of the new house by the temple even before the sun had sunk behind the western hills, waiting for Huang to come home so that she could discuss her problems with him at dinner.

She was thinner lately. The innumerable details of the women's association were a heavy burden. She never had a moment to herself. Dark circles appeared beneath her expressive oval eyes. She was a changed person. Her abdomen was a bit distended with child, and a nameless oppressive sense of foreboding never left her.

Huang, too, was enormously busy, so much so that his health had become impaired. His face was thin and sallow. His eyes, more like a pair of lonely stars above the plain than ever, shone with a feeble weary light. He was not as handsome as he had been two or three months before. During the day he had to look after all the affairs of the peasant association with the red-nosed chairman, at night he served as Meichun's teacher and guide.

Today, Meichun stood waiting for him as usual.

The sun was just setting, and when she saw his thin figure in the distance dragging a long shadow beneath the brightly hued clouds, she hurried forward to meet him.

"How did it go today?" she asked warmly.

"Fine," he smiled. "Not only did many more peasants join the association — some of them insisted on talking about land reform. And you, Meichun, how were things with you?"

"We did very well too. Only we had a big argument again over what to do about child brides and whether widows can remarry.

三

因为会中有很多的事情不能够解决，梅春姐往往在太阳还没有压山以前，就站在那大庙旁边的新屋子门口，等候着她的黄回家来吃晚饭。

她近来是现得更加清瘦了，女会中的繁琐的事务，就像一副不能卸脱的沉重的担子似的，压着她那细弱的腰肢，使她丝毫都不能偷空一下。她的那扁桃形的，含情的眼眶上，已经印上着一层黑黑的圈子了。她的姿态好像完全变成另一个人了。她的肚皮微微地高出着，并且有一种不知名的，难当的气息，时时刻刻在袭击和翻动着她那不能安静的内心。

黄也和她一样，为了繁重事务，几乎将身子都弄坏了。他的脸瘦了，皮肤晒黄了，眼睛便更加现得像一对大的，荒凉的星一般地，发着稀微而且困倦的光亮。他也完全没有两三个月前那样漂亮了。因为他不但白天要和红鼻子老会长解决一切会中的事务，而且夜间还要为梅春姐做义务教师和指导者。

今天，梅春姐也和往常一样，老早就站在那里等着她的黄回来。

太阳刚刚一落下去，她就在那晚霞的辉映里，遥远地看到了黄的那拖长着的瘦弱的影子，并且急忙地迎上去。

"怎样呢？黄啦！……今天？……"她温和地问道。

Most of the old folks don't agree. . . ."

Hand in hand, they entered the house as she talked. They ate their dinner in the small light of a lamp. Because their matters were urgent, they discussed them hastily.

Carefully, like a primary-school student who has memorized her lesson, Meichun related all that had happened that day — what families were unwilling to give up their child brides, who were preventing widows from joining the women's association, who had come to weep and accuse, who had come pleading friendship. . . . Meichun had not been able to solve any of these problems. She gazed at Huang like a child longing for help, hoping that he would quickly give her the answers.

Huang smiled. "What do you think?" he asked encouragingly.

"It seems to me. . . now. . . we ought to give the old folks some face. They used to be very good to me. We mustn't rush ahead too fast. For instance, if some family's been rearing a child bride for seven or eight years, you can't just snatch her away. It would hurt their feelings. Widows are the same. Maybe they don't want to marry again anyhow. . . ."

Bursting into laughter, Huang covered his eyes with his hands.

"What's the matter? Why are you laughing?" asked Meichun, embarrassed.

"Why are you still such a softy, my dear? Do you really believe everything is so simple?"

"Then what do you think?"

"I think you're proceeding too slowly. Your women's association is lagging behind in every way. How can you consider face or think

“今天好!”黄笑着说。“不但又有很多人来加入了会,而且还有人争执到‘土地’的问题上来了!……但是,姐啦!今天你们的呢?……”

“我们也好!……黄!”她说。“不过,关于解放‘细媳妇’和再嫁寡妇们的事,今天又闹过一些乱子!……因为一班老年人都……”

黄却没有等着细听她的报告,就一同挽着手走进屋子里了。他们在一盏细细的灯光前吃过晚饭,因为事情上急,便又匆忙地讨论起问题来。

梅春姐小心地,就像小学生背课文那样的,将日中怎么发生乱子的经过,通统背诵出来了:——是谁不愿将“细媳妇”交出来,是谁曾阻拦寡妇们入会,是谁来会中哭诉着,纠缠着,又是谁要来会中讲交情,求面子……这些问题她通统不能解决。她用了一种孩子们般的无办法和渴望着救助似的神气,凝注着黄的面貌,希望他能迅速地给答复下来。

黄笑着,并且勉慰地问她了:

“姐啦!你的意思呢?”

“我以为,……现在,……黄啦!”她说,“我们也应给老年人一些情面,这些老人家过去对我都蛮好的,……因为,我们不要来得太急!……譬如人家带了七八年的‘细媳妇’,一下子就将她们的夺去,也实在太伤心了!……我说,……寡妇也是一样啦!说不定是她们自己真心不愿嫁呢?……”

黄不让她再说下去,便扪着他的眼睛,禁不住哈哈大笑起来了。

“怎样呢?黄啦!你为什么笑呢?”她自觉

you're going too fast in matters like these? You're supposed to be acting for the good of all, my dear. For example, if we hadn't compelled the women to cut their hair, would they have done it themselves? If we hadn't forced them to give up foot-binding, would they have quit of their own accord? If we hadn't put pressure on the men, would they have quit beating and cursing their wives, would they have quit tormenting their child brides? It's the same with everybody. Take yourself, for example. If you hadn't opposed Lantern Chen so strenuously and left him, would you and I be together today?"

"But suppose the old women come around again, and plead or raise a row?" Meichun was still hesitant.

"What's so difficult about that? Ignore them or chase them out, my dear. That's all there is to it."

Huang paused. His warm searching glance, insistently seeking a response, seized upon her every move and expression.

Frogs were croaking in the spring fields. Theirs was not the mournful drone of dying autumn insects but a joyous song. The stillness of the night and the fragrance of spring flowers stole into the room.

Inclining her head and slightly narrowing her oval eyes, Meichun thought for a long time. Suddenly, as if someone had just hinted the answer to her, she rushed into Huang's arms and shyly admitted:

"You're right. How could I have been so dense? Starting tomorrow, I'll do it your way. I'll settle all the questions and report to district headquarters. I won't show those old women any sympathy,

地羞惭地说。

“你为什么还是这样一副软弱的心肠呢？我的心爱的姐！……你以为一切的事情通统这样的简单吗？”

“那么，你以为怎样呢？黄啦！”她追问道。

“我以为你还来得太慢了呀！姐！……你们女人会的事情样样都落在人家的后面呢！……你以为做这样的事情还能讲情面吗？还嫌做得太急吗？……这是替大家谋幸福的事情呀！我的心爱的姐！……譬如我们过去如果不强着替她们剪头发，她们会自己剪吗？……不强着替她们放脚，她们会不‘包细脚’吗？……不强着压制一班男人家，他们会不打老婆，不骂老婆和不折磨‘细媳妇’吗？……我的姐！一切的事情通统都是这样的呀！……又譬如你——姐！你如果不急急地反抗和脱离陈灯笼，我们又怎能有今日呢？……”

“假如她们那些人要再来求情和争闹呢？”梅春姐仍然虚心地犹豫着！

“那还有什么为难的呢？我的心爱的姐！——不睬她们或赶出他们，就得啦！……”

黄停顿了一下，用了一种温和的，试探的视线，在追求和催逼着她的回话，并且捉着她的每一个细密的表情和举动。

外面的田野中的春蛙，已经普遍地，咯咯地嚣叫起来了。这不是那凄凉的秋虫的悲咽声，这是一种快乐的，欢狂的歌唱。一阵夜的静穆和春天的野花底香气，渐渐地侵袭到这住屋的周围来了。

梅春姐偏着头，微微地凝着她那扁桃形的

right? I'll ask all the child brides and widows down to our women's association and let them decide for themselves. That's the way, isn't it, Huang?"

Bending his head he lightly kissed her moist lips. "Right, my dear," he said teasingly. "What took you so long to understand?"

As if hearing their harmonious affectionate conversation, the frogs outside increased the vigour of their throaty chorus.

Rumours again began in the village — and not only about the women's association. Nobody knew where they came from. At first only small groups of four or five were seen whispering together. Then, like a pool that has been disturbed, the ripples spread to every corner of the village and beyond its bounds.

The most important of these rumours were, of course, connected with the women of the association, especially Meichun and Mrs. Liu. Some said that after June all wives would be "communized." Others said no, not until July — in June the women would first parade naked through the streets so that the men could see what they were choosing. Others said the older people were in danger. Everyone over forty would be killed before the first of June to save grain. Still others alleged that for the same reason all babes in arms would also be slaughtered. Some even claimed the iron mongers in the towns were working day and night, making the knives and spears needed for the massacre, that they had seen these preparations with their own eyes.

Many eligible for this special treatment were quite upset. What was it all about? Only Cucumber seemed to know the details, par-

眼睛，想了半天。突然地，她像得了什么人的暗示而觉悟过来了似的，一下子倒到黄的怀抱里，娇羞地，认错似地说道：

"对，黄啦！你的对！——我太不行了！是吧？……从明天起，我要下决心地依照你的说法去做——将那些事情通统解决下来，并且报到区会中去！……不要再给她们留情面了，是吗？……我得将'细媳妇'和寡妇通统叫到我们的会中来，听她们自家的情愿！……是吗，黄啦？……"

黄将头低下来，轻轻地吻着了她的湿润的嘴唇，开心地叫道：

"是啦！我的心爱的姐，你怎么这些时才想清的呢？……"

外面的春蛙，似乎也都听到了他们这和谐的、亲爱的说话一样，便更加鼓叫得有劲起来了！……

四

倒不只是因为女人的会底原故，村子里又起了谣言了。而且谁都不知道这谣言是从什么地方来的。最初不过是三个，五个人秘密地闲谈，议论着。到后来，便像搅浑了的水浪似的，波及到全村子以及村子以外的任何个角落去了。

谣言的最主要的一些，当然还是离不了女人会的行动，尤其是梅春姐的和柳大娘的。一派人说：过了六月，便要实行"公妻"了。另一派人又说：不是的，要过七月；因为六月里女人得

ticularly these concerning the "communizing of wives" and the "naked women's parade." Like a public crier, he told everyone he met:

"It's definite. Nobody has to worry about not having a wife. Ha-ha. Mother's — It'll be some sight. In July, communized wives. You can go down to the women's association and ask for anyone you like. They'll all take part in a 'naked women's parade' first. You can pick whoever you like the best and take her home. Yes sir, a 'naked women's parade'...ha-ha. Haven't you heard? It's really going to be something. Let me tell you. Meichun and Mrs. Liu and those widows and child brides in the women's association are all going to strip down... take off their pants... ha-ha... and march through the village streets. Ha-ha. You don't believe it? Call me bastard if it's not true. Backsides, tits, bellies, thighs — they're going to show everything they've got. Oh-ho, it's going to be wonderful...."

When Cucumber really warmed to his story he gestured animatedly, as if he had already been to the women's association and got himself a pretty wife. His small eyes narrowed into slits and the perfumed straw sachet on his belt danced. At that moment if anyone had given him the least encouragement he probably would have dropped his own trousers to demonstrate.

Meichun first heard the rumours one very busy morning. She had just settled many complicated cases regarding marriages, divorces, child brides and widows and was preparing to go to district headquarters in town to make a report. Mrs. Liu, looking shocked and angry, hastened in.

先举行一个“裸体游乡大会”，好让男人家去自由选择。一派人说：老头子们都危险，只要上了四十岁的年纪，通统要在六月一日以前杀掉，免得消耗口粮。又有一派人说：孩子们也是一样，不能够走路的也通统要杀掉，而且还有人从城里和镇上亲眼看到过铁店里在日夜不停地打刀，铸剑，准备杀人。这就使很多够资格的人都感到惶惶不安起来了。这到底是怎样一回事呢？……全村子里似乎只有老黄瓜一个人知道得非常详细——那特别是关于“公妻”和“裸体游乡”的事情。他就像一个通村的保甲似的，逢人遍告着。

“一定的呀！”他说，“我们大家都不要愁没老婆了。……哈哈！妈的！真好看啦！……七月一定‘公妻’。……只要你们高兴，到女人会中自由去选择好了。她们在七月以前通统要‘裸体游乡’一次的——那时候，你就可以拣你自己所喜爱的那个，带到家里来！……唔，是的呀！……‘裸体游乡’！……哈哈！……你们通统不知道吗？……那才有味啦！……告诉你：……那就是——哈哈！……就是——就是——女会中的梅春姐，柳大娘和那些寡妇，‘细媳妇’她们，……通统脱掉衣裳，……脱掉裤子，……在我们的村子里游来游去！……唔！……哈哈！……你真不信吗？……我要骗了你我是你的灰孙子啦！……屁股，奶奶，肚子，大腿和那个，——通统都露在外面哩！唔！看啦！哈哈！……哎哟！哎哟！——我的天哪！——我的妈哪！——哈哈！……”

老黄瓜说得高兴的时候，就像已经从女会

"It's enough to drive you to your grave," Mrs. Liu cried furiously. "That Cucumber is smearing us all over the village. He says we're all... we're all — "

"Well, what is he saying?" Meichun strove to appear calm.

"'Communized wives'... 'naked women's parade'... as if he'd already seen them. That son of a bitch...."

After learning the facts from Mrs. Liu, Meichun postponed her trip to town and called on other members of her association.

None of them knew where the rumours originated. They decided to nab Cucumber and question him, but he got wind of it and went into hiding.

That night, Huang returned from town. Like a harassed little lamb, Meichun flung herself upon his chest and told him about the rumours. In a hurt dejected voice she demanded:

"Why are there so many backward people in this world? Why must they invent rumours, slanders? Before you and I knew each other — rumours. After we met — more rumours. When we came back to work in the village, formally and officially, I thought that would be the end of them. But now... those people have even dirtied the name of our women's association. Why must they be so vile? Where did those stories start? Tell me, Huang."

Gently stroking her short hair, Huang did not reply immediately. He frowned. In the lamplight, there was an uneasy gleam in his starry beguiling eyes. His pale thin face was thoughtful, as though pondering some approaching disaster.

Meichun was astonished.

"Huang, why don't you answer me?"

中拣得了一个漂亮的老婆似的，手舞脚蹈起来了。他的小眼睛眯得只剩了一条细线，草香荷包震得一摆一摆。如果那时有人从旁边怂恿他几句，他是很可以脱掉裤子，亲自表演一下的。

梅春姐听到这一类的谣言，正是在一个事务纷忙的早上。她已经将很多繁重的离婚，结婚，“细媳妇”和寡妇的事情通统弄好了，准备到镇上的区会中去作报告，——柳大娘匆匆地走进来了。她用了一种吃惊的，生气般的神情，对梅春姐大声地叫嚷道：

“真的，……气死人啦！……梅春姐你还不知道吗？——老黄瓜在村子里将我们造谣造得一塌糊涂了！他说，他说，……我们通统，通统，……”

“啊！怎样呢？……他说？——”梅春姐尽量装得非常镇静地，截着问。

“什么‘公妻’啦！……‘裸体游乡’啦！……他就像已经亲眼看见过的一样！……那龟孙子！……”

梅春姐一一向柳大娘问明白之后，便郑重地将到镇上去的事情暂时搁下，带着这些谣言亲自去找其他的会中人去了。

可是，谁都不知道这谣言是从什么地方来的。当他们决定要将老黄瓜抓来问一问的时候，老黄瓜却早已闻风逃避得不知去向了。

夜晚，黄从镇上回来。梅春姐气得像一头受了委屈的小羊般的，倒在他的怀抱里，一五一十地告诉他村子里怎样发生谣言的经过，并且还沮丧地，忧伤地叹息道：

“黄，为什么世界上偏偏有这样一些不开通

Though his brows were knit, he laughed briefly and said: "No reason. Only... those rumours... weren't invented in our village. They're part of a plot."

"A plot?" Startled, Meichun sat up.

"Yes. There's been a big change in the provincial capital. That's no rumour. They met all night in town yesterday to discuss it."

"Oh. Then what should we do, Huang? If there's a change in the province, won't we have to stop our work here?"

"Certainly not." Huang rose and paced the floor. "We're not absolutely sure about it yet. But even if it's true, even if some calamity has happened, can we just abandon our work and run away? There's no other road open to us. As long as we're alive, we must keep moving forward."

Meichun trembled. An emotion forged by years of torment possessed her.

"If a change is really coming, should we still hold the rehearsal of our new play the day after tomorrow?"

"Of course."

Since Huang spoke like that, Meichun felt everything would be secure once more. Her courage and determination were strengthened considerably.

Was it due to her swelling waist line that she felt ill? Or was she worried and depressed over the changes brewing? The night of the rehearsal — they were going ahead in spite of everything — Meichun felt like a wandering ghost. Whether walking, sitting or

的人呢？他们为什么只专门造谣，诬害呢？……先我们还不认识的时候——谣言。认识过后——又是谣言。后来，我们正式回到村子里来作事情了，我想谣言这该不会再落到我们头上吧！……然而现在——却连我们自家的会，都要遭他们的谣言了！……黄，他们为什么偏偏这样混帐呢？……关于这些谣言，他们都从什么地方造出来的呢？……黄啦！你告诉我呀！黄啦！……”

黄轻轻地抚弄着她的短发，并没有即刻就答复她这问题。他的眉头深深地连锁着；他的那星星般的撩人的眼睛，在灯光下微微地带着一些不稳定的光彩；他的那清瘦的面容，似乎正在深思，疑虑着一桩什么未来的大祸事一样。

梅春姐深深地诧异起来了。

“黄啦！你为什么又不回我的话呢？”

黄皱皱眉头，笑了一下。他说：

“没有什么，姐！……不过，这些谣言都不是我们村子里自己造出来的！这是一条——毒计！”

“毒计？”梅春姐吃惊地坐起来了。

“是的，不是谣言，姐！而且听说省城里还有了大的变动哩！……昨天镇上开了一通宵的会，就专为这事情的。”

“啊！——那怎么办呢？黄，……假如省里一变动，我们现在的事情，不通统都要停下来吗？”

“那当然不能停的！”黄站起来兜着圈子，断然地说。“莫要说这还只是些谣言，消息，姐，即使是真的有什么大祸发生了，我们还能抛掉这

talking, she was nervous and uneasy.

Rumours were everywhere, like heavy black clouds that threatened to block out the sun and the moon. They no longer concerned Meichun alone, but the whole situation. Some said not only had there been a change in the provincial capital, but soldiers of the opposition were marching also into the county seats, and the nearby town was very disturbed. The rich, who had been driven out, were all coming back. They were preparing to settle scores with the people in the various village associations, and would use all sorts of low and terrible methods to get their revenge. They were most venomous in their threats against the women. Any woman who had joined the women's association would be arrested and killed. Those who had not joined but had cut their hair would be given to the monks in the mountain monasteries.

But the rehearsal in the temple went on as if none of the actors knew anything about this. Huang had written the script himself. It dealt with the crimes of a wealthy landowner who exploited his hired hands and took advantage of poor women. Because it was a complicated story involving many characters, in addition to the red-nosed old chairman of the peasant association, Meichun, Mrs. Liu, Wooden Image and Huang playing roles, it had been necessary to send a messenger with urgent invitations to Aunt Pockmark and a great many young men and women to fill the minor parts. A full-scale rehearsal was scheduled for that night.

Huang played the villain. He wore a small goatee and a pair of dark glasses, and was dressed in an entirely inappropriate long gown with wide sleeves. The old chairman acted the part with

里的事情逃脱吗？……姐，我们目前已经没有其他的路了呀！不是死——那就只有努力地朝前干下去呢……”

梅春姐轻轻地战栗了一下！然而，却给一种数年磨折出来的苦难的意志，将她匡住了。

“那么，假如真的要变动起来，我们后天的排新戏还排不排呢？”

“当然排娄！——”

黄这样一说，梅春姐便觉得一切的事，都从新得了保护似的，勇气和意志都坚强不少了。

五

是因为肚子渐渐地大起来了的病态底变化呢？还是由于局势的不安而感到忧愁，疑惧呢？……在大家不顾一切而进行排戏的那晚上，梅春姐总觉得有些像亡魂失魄那样的，连行，坐，说话，都现得难安、恍惚起来了。

这时候，外面的谣言就像一片大大的乌云，浓雾似的，将天空和日月都几乎遮蔽着。这不是从前的那种关于梅春姐一个人的谣言了，这是关于整个的大局的啦！有人说：不但是省城里有了变动，而且县城里也开来了新的反对的兵了，镇上也现出惶惶不安的景象来了。有钱的，先前被赶出村子的人现在通统要溜回来了。他们全准备着，要和村子里各会中的人算账。并且要拿各种各样的，可怕底手段，来报复各会中的人。关于女人们，他们尤其说得恶毒：入过会的，抓来——杀！不曾入会而剪掉了头发的，现在通统要送到五台山或南岳山去给和尚！……

which he was most familiar — that of the hired hand. Meichun was the wife of the landlord, Mrs. Liu was his concubine, and Wooden Image played the servant boy. Aunt Pockmark and the others acted the parts of poor tenants who had been exploited beyond endurance and were planning to rise against the landlord.

The sky was pitch dark. A cool muggy early summer breeze, sweeping through the temple and across the high outside platform, nearly extinguished the big lanterns hanging in a row. The cheerful noisy croaking of frogs was now rarely heard in the fields. Replacing this was the mournful plaint of a new batch of insects. The night seemed to have sunk into a deep frightful pit from which there was no escape. There it waited quietly for the disaster it was expecting.

After the roles were assigned, the actors put on their costumes and began learning their lines for the first act. This had to be done orally because practically none of them could read. But before Huang had finished reading the very first line, suddenly, from somewhere in the darkness beyond, gunfire rent the air.

Everyone was petrified. Another volley, then another.

It was less an abrupt change than the arrival of a calamity at its appointed time. Startled, panicky, in despair, everyone started milling around and shouting. Women and children wept. Young men rushed out of the temple compound gate and fled into the darkness.

Truly a shocking, terrifying moment.

Moving swiftly like a pouncing cat, Huang extinguished the row of lanterns. Alarmed and upset, Meichun stuck to him closely.

然而，他们却还像并不知道的那样，仍然在关帝爷庙中排他们的戏。那戏是黄亲自编作出来的。为的是要表演一个很有田地的人，剥削长工和欺压穷困女人的罪恶。因为主角配角的人都要得非常多而且复杂的原故，除红鼻子老会长，梅春姐，柳大娘，木头壳和黄自己之外，还派人到村中去强邀了麻子婶以及很多个年轻的媳妇和小伙计们来，准备大规模地练习一次。

黄自己扮那个有钱的，作恶的角色，戴着一撮小胡子和两片墨晶眼镜，穿一件太不相称的大袖子的袍子。红鼻子老会长仍然扮他那最熟习的长工的角色。梅春姐扮有钱人的大太太，柳大娘扮姨太太，木头壳扮听差的小孩子。此外，麻子婶以下，便通统扮穷困妇人和那受剥削受得太多，而商量共同起来反抗的种田汉。

外面的天色已经变得乌黑无光了，一阵初夏的清凉而阴郁的空气，掠入庙堂来，扑到高高的戏台上，将一排巨大的灯光都几乎扇灭了。

这时候，在野外，很少能再听到快乐的，高叫的蛙声，而代替了一种新虫的悲哀的低诉。夜的一切，似乎都沉入到一种深沉的，恐怖的，不能解脱的陷坑里，而静待着某一桩预料了的祸事的到来那样。

角色通统分配、化装之后，便开始了第一幕的台词底口授，因为几乎是全部的演员都不识字而无法读剧本底原故。可是，黄还没有说完他那第一幕的第一句，从外面——从那黑暗的，不知方向的一角，——突然地发出着一个裂帛似的枪声来了！

大家一怔！接着——又是第二声，第三声！……

与其说这是一个突然的变动，倒不如说，就是那一件约定的祸事底到来。当时每个人都迸出了一种惊悸的，仓皇的和绝望的脸色，并且开始大乱和大闹起来了！……女人们哭着！——孩子们哭着！……年轻力壮的人们都急忙地冲出到庙门的外面，开始向黑暗中飞逃了！……

这真是一件惊人的，可怕的事情啊！……

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黄急忙地用了一种迅速的，猫儿扑鼠般的手法，将那排巨大的灯光通统扑灭了。梅春姐惊心地，惶悚地，紧紧地靠着他的身子，并且不能抑制地，悲伤地战栗着！

红鼻子老会长和柳大娘都摸着，跌着，从黑暗中逃跑了。木头壳背着他的妈妈麻子婶，由竹篱笆的狗洞中钻出去。……

黄急忙地，下死力地将梅春姐拖着，拉着，从一道窄门中溜了出来，——这时候，大庙里已经没有一个人留着了。他喘息地一边抹掉了他的那撮假的小胡子和墨晶眼镜，一边将那件大袖子的不相称的袍子，脱下来撕得粉碎了！……

"我的天哪！天哪！……我们到哪里去呢？"梅春姐嘶声地，战栗地摸着她的大肚子呜咽着！

"不要响！……姐！……轻声些！……"黄尽量地抑制了她的悲诉。

他们背着枪声方向，轻轻地，匍匐地，爬过了一条田塍，爬过了一个高高的丘冢，一条茅丛的小路和一段短桥！……

She was unable to control her stricken trembling.

The red-nosed chairman and Mrs. Liu, groping and stumbling through the darkness, hurried away. Wooden Image, carrying his mother Aunt Pockmark on his back, plunged off through a hole in the bamboo fence.

Huang hastily dragged Meichun through a narrow doorway, pulling with all his strength. By then not a soul was left in the temple. He yanked off his dark glasses and false beard, panting hard, then removed the inappropriate gown and tore it to shreds.

"Heaven, Heaven, where shall we go?" cried Meichun, holding her bulging abdomen and weeping.

"Softly. Not so loud. . . ." Huang did his best to quiet her.

They crept across a field away from the firing, over a high grave mound, then stealthily followed an overgrown path and crossed a short bridge. When they had almost reached the shore of the lake they tripped over something and fell.

Three or four rough big rascals clutched them by the lapels. When they realized what had happened they were very shaken. Overcome with pain and misery they lapsed into unconsciousness.

From the dark night sky a fine rain began to fall.

V

The June sun was hot as fire. Three old men — Grandpa Four, Uncle Li and Whiskers Guan — sat smoking beside the lake in the cool shade of a big maple. They were discussing the remarkable tumultuous events that had occurred in the past six months.

当他们快要爬到那湖滨的时候,……突然地,给一个东西一绊!——梅春姐和黄便连身子都给绊倒下来了!

三四只粗大的黑手,连忙捉着,抓住着他们的胸襟!——当他们明白了这是怎样的一回事情之后,便一齐震得,疼痛得昏迷过去了!……

夜的黑暗的天空中,正开始飘飞着一阵细细的雨滴!……

第五章

一

巴巴头,万万岁;
瓢鸡头,用枪毙!

六月的太阳火一般地燃烧着。三个老头子:四公公,李六伯伯,关胡子,坐在湖滨的一棵老枫树底下吃烟,乘凉;并且谈论着这半年来的一切新奇、动乱的时事。

Grandpa Four, whose beard was whitest, looked very worried. He kept plying the robust Whiskers Guan with questions.

"You've just been to the county town. Isn't there any other news?"

"No," replied Guan, stroking his beard. "Except that some say Lantern Chen's wife and that Huang fellow, probably in the next few days — "

"The next few days? Ah, poor young man. Heaven must have decreed it. And the woman has a child in her womb...." Grandpa Four lowered his head like an injured gander. There was a sob in his voice as he proclaimed: "I said it long ago — women with short hair go bad, the whole world changes...."

Uncle Li rubbed his irritated eyes. Sweat etched fine lines on his thin dusty face. He had started to speak when Grandpa Four's querulous tones interrupted him.

Grandpa Four's gloom deepened. Not only did he feel sorry for Huang and Meichun, but he was very concerned about the way the world was going. He had witnessed many changes in his more than seventy years: High and mighty Qing Dynasty officials, the guns and cannons that overthrew them, the battles between the northern and the southern soldiers. But never had he seen such remarkable transformations as were now taking place.

A hot southern wind swirled up the dust. The old men turned their backs on the shore. In the middle of the lake stood an island of emerald reeds, rippling like waves.

Unable to repress the misery in his heart, Grandpa Four gazed at the green fields. Virtually weeping, he exclaimed:

四公公,那个白胡髭的最老的老头子,满面忧烦,焦虑地,向那健壮的关胡子麻麻烦烦地问着,关胡子就告诉他那么一个歌儿。

"你上街回啦!总还有旁的消息吧?……"

"没有。"关胡子又说,一面用手摸着他的胡髭。"不过,那姓黄的和陈灯笼的嫂子,听说会在近天中……"

"近天中?……唉!可怜的小伙子!天收人啊!那个女人还怀了小孩子哩!……"四公公的头颅低低地垂着,就像一只被打伤了的鹅般的,他的声音酸哽起来了。"总之,我们早就说了的:女人没有头发要变的,世界要变的哪!……"

李六伯伯揉揉他的烂眼处,一副涂满了灰尘的瘦弱的面庞上,被汗珠子画成了好几道细细的沟纹。他想开口说一句什么,但又被四公公的怨声拦阻着。

四公公是更加忧愁了,他不单是痛惜黄和梅春姐,他对于这样的世界,实在是非常耽心的。七十多年来的变化,他已经瞧的不少了:前清时州官府尹的威势,反正时的大炮与洋枪,南兵和北兵打,北兵和南兵拚,他都曾见过。可是经过像目前这般新奇的变化,他却还是有生以来的头一遭。

一阵沸热的南风,将地上的灰尘高扬了。大家将头背向湖中,一片荒洲的青翠的芦苇,如波涛般地摇晃着。

四公公到底沉不住心中的悲哀了,他回头来望着那油绿的田园,几乎哭着,说:

"In the Huang Chao Uprising, the rebels killed eight million, but the countryside was never as desolate as this. There's not a young man left."

"It will be even more desolate than this in the future." Whiskers Guan was always exaggerating. He stroked his beard with a knowing air. "The day will come when there'll be food and no one to eat it, clothes and no one to wear them."

Uncle Li opened wide his irritated eyes. "We must wait for the True Emperor to come. Only then will there be peace. The Republic is only eighteen and a half years old. In the latter half of the twentieth year, we shall have peace," he predicted, " — if only the True Emperor comes."

"There are still plenty of witches and demons abroad," said Whiskers Guan.

"Yes, but this is their year of reckoning." Uncle Li seemed quite confident. "Next year will be all right. And the year after, things will be even better."

"The year after? Ah," Grandpa Four sighed. "My bones will be used for drumsticks by then. I never thought after seventy years I'd live to see such a disaster."

Life's road was hard. Who could traverse it?

People were not what they used to be. Could they be brought back to righteousness?

Those like Meichun and Huang had perhaps brought their troubles on themselves. But what about the others? The old folks and the young people?

It was all like a dream. Meichun, stroking her huge belly, had

“你看啦！黄巢造反杀人八百万，都没听说有这般冷静！一个年轻些的人都瞧不见他们了！……”

“将来还有冷静的时候呢。”关胡子又老是那么夸大的，像蛮懂得般的神气，摸着他的胡髭。“将来会有有饭无人吃，有衣无人穿的日子来的啊！……”

李六伯伯将他的烂眼睛睁开了：

“我晓得！要等真命天子出来了，世界才得清平。民国只有十八年零六个月，后年下半年就会太平的，就有真命天子来的！……”

“妖孽还多哩！”关胡子说。

“是呀，今年就是扫清妖孽的年辰呀！……”李六伯伯的心中更像有把握般的。“明年就好了。后年，就更加清平！……”

“后年？唉！……”四公公叹着，“我的骨头一定要变成鼓捶子了。想不到活七十多年还要遭一回这样的殃啊！……唉！……”

世路艰难了——又有谁能走过呢？

人心不古了——又有谁能挽回呢？

像梅春姐和黄他们那样的人，也许原有些是自己招惹来的吧。但，其他的呢？老头子们和年轻的人们呢？……

一只白色的狗，拖着长长的舌头，喘息着从老远奔来，在李六伯伯的跟前停住着。它的舌头还没有舐到李六伯伯的烂眼睛上，就被他兜头一拳——击得“汪！”的一声飞逃了。

been lying alone in a damp dark cell for over a month. The stink of mildew made her dizzy. She couldn't stand very long because of her frequent nausea and the stirrings of the child in her abdomen. Even breathing seemed difficult.

Outside the cell was a narrow corridor. Beyond, a high compound wall blocked out the sky, so that the cell was always dark and gloomy as a tomb. The only sound was the measured tramp of footsteps and the slapping of a bayonet scabbard against the guard's thigh. A tough fat matron whose nose resembled the snout of a pig came to check up on Meichun three times a day. Further down the corridor, on both sides were about a dozen men's cells, dirty as sties.

Meichun was more worried about Huang and the infant in her womb than about her own fate. All day long she was consumed by fear. Like the roots which remain after a tooth is painfully extracted, the precious fresh things that had come into her life during the previous six months were still deep in Meichun's heart. They left a colourful yet painful picture. For she remembered how they had been seized and brought here, how she had taken leave of Huang in the corridor, his anxious face and strong encouraging words, what happened to others who had been arrested at the same time....

And in the mornings, when bugles called and soldiers trotted to their posts, and the piggy matron beat her with a whip, she recalled her past all the more vividly. From beginning to end. She forgot nothing. Meichun's body contracted convulsively. She was sure that because of her previous activities she was doomed. She

二

一切的事都像梦一般的。

在一个阴暗的潮腐的小黑屋子里，梅春姐摸着她的那大大的肚皮独自个儿斜斜地躺了一个多月。一股极难堪的霉腐的臭气，时时刻刻袭击着她那昏痛的头颅。一种孕妇的恶心的呕吐，与胎儿的冲击，使她的全身都不能够支持地，连呼吸都现得艰难起来了。

室外是一条狭窄的走廊，高高的围墙遮蔽了天空和日月——乌黑地，阴森森地，像永远埋在坟墓中般的。只有一阵通通的脚步声和刺刀鞘的劈拍声来回地响着。一个胖得像母猪般的翻天鼻子的，凶残的看守妇，一日三通地来监视着梅春姐的饮食与起居。在走廊的两旁的前方，是十余间猪栏般的男囚室。

与其说是惧怕着自家在这一次大变动中的恶运，倒不如说是挂虑黄与那胎儿的生命的为真。梅春姐镇日地沉陷到一种深重的恐怖中了。大半年来的宝贵的，新鲜的生活底痕迹，就像那忍痛拔除的牙齿还留下着一个不可磨灭的牙根般的，深深地留在梅春姐的心里了。是一幅很分明的着色的伤心的图画呢！她是怎样地在那一夜被捉到这阴森的屋子里来的，她又是怎样地在走廊前和黄分别，黄的枯焦的颜色和坚强的慰语，其他的同来人的遭遇！……

这般的，尤其是一到了清晨——当号声高鸣的时候，当兵丁们往来奔驰的时候，当那母猪般的看守妇拿皮鞭子来抽她的时候，这伤心的

could bear up no longer. Shivering, she broke into sobs.

"Ai... maybe in the morning, maybe at night... they'll come for me ... Heaven, oh Heaven...."

But the main cause of her shuddering was not her own fate. She couldn't forget the new life she had led the past half year or more. And now a darling baby was growing within her. And how could she leave Huang, dear Huang whose eyes were like stars?

"Ai, ai, Heaven."

The pig-snouted matron came by and poked Meichun out of her dreams with a long stick. Supporting her pendulous abdomen, Meichun walked unsteadily to the door. An ugly face, rancid with sweat, looked at her menacingly through the bars.

In the past month whenever the matron cursed and beat her, Meichun always covered her fear and pain with a timid smile and, mustering her courage, asked for news of the men's cells and about Huang's safety. Even though she knew the matron wouldn't tell her, or at best would lie, she still had to ask. Meichun always trembled before she spoke, but it wasn't until she got an answer — perhaps a false one only meant to fool her — that she was able to comfort herself and sleep.

Thus, more than a month had already passed.

But what was wrong with her today? Was it because the matron looked too fierce? Or was she too frightened? Even after the matron had vented her spleen viciously and started walking away, Meichun still didn't dare to ask about Huang. Only after the matron was halfway down the corridor did she finally manage to tear out the words, like a knife stuck in her throat, and call:

图画，就会更加明显地开展在梅春姐的面前；连头连尾，半点都不曾遗忘掉。她的全身痉挛着！因此而更加证实了她的恶运，是怎样不能避免地就要临头了。她暗中不能支持她自家地，微微地抖战着，呜咽着！……

"唉！……也许，清晨吧！……夜间吧！……唉！我的天哪！……"

然而，归根结蒂，自家的恶运，到底还不是使梅春姐惊悸的主要原因。她的这大半年来不能遗忘的新的生活，她的那开始感到有了生命的，还不知道性别的可爱的胎儿，她的黄，他的星一般撩人的眼睛！……

"唉！唉！……我的天哪！……"

翻天鼻子的看守妇走来了，她用一根粗长的木棍，将梅春姐从梦幻中挑醒来。梅春姐就抱着她的大大的肚皮，蹒跚地移到窗门上。一种极难看的凶残的脸相，一种汗臭和一种霉酸的气味，深沉地胁迫与刺痛着梅春姐的身心！

在往常，在这一个多月中，在无论怎样的恐怖与沉痛的心情之下，当看守妇走来在她的身上发泄了那凶残的，无名的责骂之后，梅春姐总还要小心陪笑地鼓着胆子问过一回关于男囚室的消息与黄的安全。虽然她明知道看守妇不会告诉她，或者是欺蒙了她，但她仍然不能不问。并且她在问前，还常常一定要战栗了好几回，一定等到了那也许是假的，也许是欺蒙她的安全的回答之后，她才敢自欺自慰地安睡着。

这样的，已经一个多月下来了！……

但，今天，还是怎么的呢？还是看守妇的脸色过于凶残呢？还是自家的心中过于惊悸呢？

"Matron... come back...."

Angrily, the porcine woman turned her thickset body and strode to the cell window. Hands on her hips, her teeth gnawing her swollen lips, she glared at Meichun and demanded:

"What do you want?"

Screwing up her courage, Meichun asked tremblingly:

"Huang...what about Huang?"

"Who the hell cares?" the matron snorted coldly. She spat and walked away.

Meichun stood a long time by the window. Her eyes seemed to be going dark. A burning anxiety, a terrible despair gripped her.

"Heaven, what shall I do? Isn't there anyone else I can ask?"

The tramp of feet and the slap of a bayonet scabbard approached. A dirty sweaty gun-bearing lout leered at her hungrily.

Again trembling, again gathering her courage, Meichun hailed him:

"Could you please tell me... in the men's cells... a prisoner named Huang?..."

The dirty soldier wiped his sweaty face with his sleeve and walked up to Meichun's window, his eyes fixed upon her face.

"What is he to you?"

"We... we came together," she stammered.

"Oh, him. All those fellows...."

Meichun shook violently. In a terror of suspense she stared at the dirty soldier's lips, waiting for him to finish. He'll say: "All those fellows are sleeping in their cells," she thought. But straightening the peak of his cap, the soldier drawled:

……当看守妇和她纠缠了许多时辰，又发泄了许多无名的气愤而离开她的时候，梅春姐是始终不会，也不敢开口问过黄来。一直等到看守妇快要走过走廊了的时候，她才突然地，像一把刀子刺在喉咙中必须拔出来般的，嘶叫着：

"妈妈，……来呀！……"

看守妇满是气愤地掉过那笨重的身躯，大踏步地回到窗前来了。她双手插在腰间，牙齿咬着那臃肿的嘴唇，向梅春姐钉着：

"什么？……"

鼓着胆子，战栗地，嚅嚅地问道：

"那，黄，……黄？……"

"还有黑呢！你妈的！……"看守妇冷冰冰地用鼻子哼着，唾了一口走开了！

梅春姐在窗前又站了许多时辰，她的眼睛频频地发着黑。一种燃烧般的，焦心的悬念，一种恐怖与绝望的悲哀！

"天哪！怎么的呢？……还有没有人呢？……"

一阵通通的脚步声和劈拍的刺刀鞘声音响近来了。一个兵，一个脏污的，汗淋淋的荷枪的汉子，向她贪婪地凝望着。

梅春姐又鼓起她的胆子来，又战栗地，嚅嚅地向这脏污的兵问道：

"老总！……"

他走过来，他的眼睛牢牢射着梅春姐的脸。

"请问你！……那边，……男囚室，……一个黄，黄，……"

脏污的兵用袖子将脸膛的汗珠抹去，他更进一步地靠到她的窗前。

"They were taken out this morning — "

"This morning?"

A streak of lightning, a clap of thunder. Her heart shattered. A black boulder as big as a mountain was crushing her down. She seemed to be floating, to be falling into an abyss from a great height. Her head struck against the bars and she collapsed in a heap.

The child in her womb moved repeatedly. Her abdomen was splitting with pain. She rolled in agony on the floor.

She had no thoughts, no soul. The whole world dissolved in tears and sweat, in sobs and groans.

Furiously the matron rushed up and opened the door. When she saw Meichun's condition, she yelled:

"Stinking wench, you're going to give birth. Why don't you lie still?"

Meichun lay close to the wall, biting the dirty floor boards, her lips bleeding. The movements of the child seemed to be tearing her insides. Rolling in pain, she gradually lost consciousness.

The matron leaned over and extracted a bloody infant. "It's come ahead of time," she shouted with a curse. "And a boy, too." To the dirty soldier she called: "Let me have your bayonet. I've got to cut this umbilical cord."

Lantern Chen, after drifting about the countryside for over half a year, suddenly returned to the village. It was only when he heard that everything had changed that he dared come back.

His house looked unusually dreary and bleak. It was completely

“你是他的什么人啦？……”

梅春姐有点儿口吃起来了：

“是……同来的！……”

“他吗？……”那脏污的兵说，“他，他们……”

梅春姐战栗了一下！她目不转睛地钉着那脏污的兵的嘴唇，她惊心地等待着他的这句话的收尾。一种悬念的火焰，焦灼地燃烧起来！她想，他该会说：“他们好好地躺在那里吧！……”但他却正正他的帽子的边沿，说道：

“他们在今天早晨——”

“早晨？——”

突然地，一道流电，一声巨雷，一个心的爆裂——像山一般的一块黑色的石头！沉重地压到梅春姐的头上！她的身子漂浮地摇摆着！像从天空中坠落到了一个深渊似的，她的头颅撞在窗前的铁栅上了。她就像跌筋头似地横身倒了下来！……

胎儿迅速而频繁地冲动着！腹部的割裂般的疼痛，使她不能够矜耐地全房翻滚了！

没有思想！没有灵魂！……整个的世界完全毁灭在泪珠和汗水，呻吟与惨泣之中！……

看守妇怒气冲天地开开门来，当她瞧到那秽水来临的分娩的征候的时候，她就大声地讪骂着：

“你妈的！你妈的！……生养了，你还不当心啦！……”

梅春姐死死地挨着墙边，牙齿咬着那污泥的地板，嘴唇流血！胎儿的冲击，就像要挖出她的心肝来般的，把她痛的，滚的，渐渐地失掉了

different. He stood before the door for a long time, afraid to enter. Like a released prisoner who has just returned, he was gripped by a brutish mournfulness, a homeless loneliness.

Not a soul was stirring in the village. It was a heavy, muggy day. A fitful hot wind blew from the south. Several wild dogs ran through Chen's desolate fields, barking and snarling.

Was it because Cucumber's little eyes were sharp, or had he heard someone say that Chen had come home? In any event it was Lantern's old friend Cucumber who was the first to greet him. He came running over as fast as he could travel. Cucumber had been expelled from the village for spreading rumours about the women's association, and he also had only recently returned. As dirty as ever, he still carried scent in a sachet of woven straw hanging from his belt. As usual he wiped the sweat and grime from his forehead with the sleeve of his tattered shirt.

Lantern Chen walked to meet the good friend he hadn't seen for more than half a year.

"So you're back, Lantern." Pleasure was written all over Cucumber's face. "I'm sure you made a pile of money."

Chen laughed. Wind and frost had worn many wrinkles in his dust-covered visage. He clapped Cucumber on the shoulder as if they really were close friends.

"Yes, I'm back." Both of them stank of dust and hot sweat. "Where is everybody?"

Cucumber hesitated, then pulled Lantern into the empty house. They sat down in the dusty entranceway. Cucumber mopped his perspiration with his sleeve and said:

知觉,完全沉入昏昏迷迷中了。

看守妇弯腰等待着:拾取了一个血糊的细小的婴儿;一面大声地嚷着,骂着!呼叫着那个脏污的,荷枪的汉子:

"他妈的!……跌下来的!……还不足月呢!……还是一个男孩子啦!……请把你的刺刀借我,断脐带!……"

三

在外面过了大半年漂流生活的陈德隆,突然地回到村子里来了。他是打听了四围都有了变动才敢回的。

在他的自己的屋子门前,呈现出一种异常的荒凉与冷落,完全变了样子了。他站在那里很久很久而不敢进门,就像一个囚徒被释放回来般的,他完全为一种牛性的,无家的,孤独的悲哀驰遣着!

村子里瞧不见一个行人了。一块阴沉的闷热的天,一阵火一般的南风的吹荡。几头野狗,在自家的荒芜的田地里奔驰,嘶吠!……

究竟还是老朋友黄瓜,是他的小眼睛的锐利呢?还是听到旁人说的陈灯笼回家了呢?他第一个不顾性命地奔来欢迎了陈灯笼。他也是因那次造了谣言,被赶掉之后,最近才回村子里来的。他的身上还是一样地脏,一样地佩一个草香荷包。一样地用破衫的袖子揩额角间的汗珠和眼粪。……

陈德隆迎上这个大半年来不曾见面的好朋友。

"Where are they? Ai... the ones in the associations have disappeared, or run away. That Huang fellow was finished off in the county seat. Your wife went with him — no, I hear she's still alive... gave birth to a boy. Ha-ha, I ought to congratulate you on becoming a father."

Lantern Chen smiled coldly. He took a cheap cigarette out of his bundle of old clothing and lit it. Casually crushing a grasshopper that flew in, he unbuttoned his shirt for coolness and listened to Cucumber.

In the distance three old men, like two withered mulberry trees flanking a sturdy elm — Whiskers Guan, with Grandpa Four and Uncle Li on either side — advanced towards Lantern's home.

Grandpa Four's strength was failing. He rapped lightly on Lantern's steps with his cane.

"Are you home, Chen? Where've you been the past half year?"

Lantern helped the three old men into the entranceway. After they were seated, he told them briefly of his unsuccessful adventures abroad, then immediately turned the conversation to Meichun and Huang.

After they had chatted a while, Grandpa Four started slowly tapping his cane. A critical note in his voice, he spoke emphatically:

"Anyhow Chen, it's you who should be blamed. How she looked after you at first — the whole village knew what a good girl she was. And you, Chen? You tortured her. You — but let's not talk about that. In short the change in Meichun and the suffering she's been through were all forced upon her by you. Right? If you hadn't been so bad to her would she be where she is today? Maybe you

"回来啦！陈灯笼！……"他说，满脸欢欣地，"一定发了大财了？……"

陈灯笼笑了一笑，他那被外面的风霜所磨折的憔悴的面容上，起了好几道糊满了灰尘的皱纹。他像一个真正的朋友般的，拍着老黄瓜的肩头，迟迟地说：

"回来了！……"一股非常难堪的热臭——汗水和灰尘臭——互相地冲袭起来。"他们呢？……村中的人呢？……"

老黄瓜痴呆了一会，拖着陈灯笼走进那荒凉的屋子里，在一条满是灰尘的门限前坐着。他一边用袖子揩去了汗珠子，说：

"他们吧？……唉！会中的人，失的失了，走的走了！……那个黄已经早在街上干掉了！……你的嫂子跟着也……不，听说她还在的，还生了一个男孩呢！……啊！啊！我应该恭禧你做了爸爸啦！……"

陈灯笼冷冷地笑着。他从破衣包里摸出了一枝贱价的纸烟来，擦根火柴吸了。他从容地踏死了一个飞来的蚱蜢；并且解开着小衫的胸襟，风凉风凉地听着老黄瓜的诉说。

遥远地，三个老头子，像两枝枯萎的桑树枝护着一条坚强的榆树一样，关胡子在中间，四公公和李六伯伯像挟着他似地向陈德隆的家中走来了。

四公公到底不行了，用了拐杖，他轻轻地敲打着陈德隆的台阶。

"回来了，德隆？……半年多些在哪里啦？……"

陈德隆招呼着这三位老人在门限前坐着，

think I'm a gabby old man, but Uncle Li and Grandpa Guan are here too. Neither of them is my relative, but they agree with me.

"Ai, ai... she's still in the county jail, and she's borne you a son — the boy is yours, Chen. She and Huang lived together only eight months, the child must be yours. Ah, even if he isn't, you know our maxims: 'No need for vengeance after your enemy is dead,' and 'One night of married love, a lifetime of devotion.' What kind of a man are you, if you don't save her? Of course, we're not saying Meichun has done no wrong. But the original fault lies with you. Grandpa has lived more than seventy years, Chen. He's seen plenty of real men in his time. Not one was ever mean enough to refuse to save a person in danger."

Lantern's head drooped. He was like a child in the presence of the three old men. His stubbornness, his ferocity, vanished. Perhaps he had been buffeted too much by the weather in the past six months, perhaps excessive stabs of loneliness had softened his heart. After hearing out the long lecture it cost Grandpa Four such an effort to give, and observing how the others — even Cucumber — had sunk into a heavy tragic silence, he began to feel that he couldn't bear to part with Meichun, that he loved her with a jealous love. He had behaved very wrongly to her, and she had repaid him with a wrong. Anyhow, this was their private misfortune. What's more, Huang was already dead and she had borne him a child. Maybe it was Huang's, but he had no time to go into that now. First, she had to be saved.

Lantern was depressed, immersed in gloom. He searched his heart for the cause and effect of the injuries he had done to

简短地告诉了一点大半年来不甚得意的行踪之后，话头便立即转到梅春姐和黄的身上来了。

交谈过一会，四公公又慢慢地将他的拐杖合拍地敲打起来。他带着教训似的声音，一字一板地说；

"……总之！这事情，这是德隆你自家的不好。当初她是怎样地对待你来！……她是全村中都晓得的，有名的好女子。而你？德隆！你将她磨折！你……现在，我们就抛开那些不谈。总之，梅春的变卦和受苦完全是你德隆逼出来的！对吗？……你不那样逼她，她能有今日吗？……是的，你一定要怪我做公公的太说直话，但李家六伯伯和关公公在呢。他们不姓陈，他们该不会说假话吧！……唉！唉！……现在，她还关在街上的，她还替你生了个男孩子——这孩子当然是你的啦，德隆！……她和姓黄的一共只有八个月，这孩子是你的啦，德隆！……唔！就算那不是你的吧，有道是'人死不记仇'啦，'一日夫妻百日恩'！……德隆，这时你不去救救她，你还能算一个人吗？当然喽，我们并不说梅春没有错，但是，最初错的还是你呀！德隆！……公公活了七十多年了，是的，好本事，好脚色的人看的不少，就从没有看见一个见死不救的，那样狠心的好脚色呢！……"

陈德隆的头低低地垂着。他在这三个老头子面前好像小孩子似的，牛性的，凶猛的性情完全萎靡了。也许是受了半年多来外间的，风霜的折磨吧，也许是受了过度的，孤单的悲哀和刺激吧，他的心思终于和缓了下来。当他听完了四公公很费力的长长的教训的时候，当他看到

Meichun in the past.

Grandpa Four tapped his cane. Uncle Li irritably shooed some flies. Whiskers Guan stroked his beard with a knowing air. Cucumber sighed sympathetically.

"Well, haven't you thought it through yet?" demanded Grandpa Four. He seemed ready to rap Lantern Chen's bald skull with his cane.

"I have, I have, Grandpa. But how can I save her?" Chen was completely like a child.

"That's why we've come," said Whiskers Guan. "Would we be here if we didn't know a way? We've figured it all out. We've only been waiting for you to return. We hear the new town magistrate is a very good fellow. He has a man under him who specializes in such affairs. We've talked it all over. We were going to do it anyhow, even if you didn't come home. We've had all the village elders sign a guarantee of her future good conduct. We were going to mortgage your land and raise a little money, then talk the case over in your name with the town magistrate's man who handles these matters and ask him to put a word in at the county government. In short, there's a good chance of success. People in other villages have done it."

Lantern Chen once more calculated for a long time. Once more he pondered on his relationship with Meichun — a dark, jealous, bitter love. But under the combined pressure of Cucumber and the old men, although he couldn't solve his conflict, sighing, he finally consented.

"I'll do everything you three old gentlemen want. Money, land

了大家——连老黄瓜——都沉入在一种重层的静默的悲哀之中的时候，他才觉得他对于梅春姐是还怀着一种不可分离的，充满了嫌忌的爱，爱着她的。虽然他过去对她非常错过，而她又用一种错过来报复了他！……总之，这一切的，他们中间的不幸的事故。何况，黄已经死了，而她又替他——也许是黄吧！但他暂时无暇去推求这些——生了孩子了，又正正地在等待人家的援救！……

他沉默着！深深地沉默着！他尽量在他自家的内心里去搜求他那时对于梅春姐的过去错过的后果和前因！……

四公公又敲起他的拐杖来了。李六伯伯在他的烂眼睛上挥掉了那讨厌的苍蝇。关胡子老像蛮懂得般的，摸着他的胡子。老黄瓜满是同情地悲叹着。

“怎么啦？……还不曾想清吗？”四公公的拐杖几乎敲到了陈德隆的光头上来地问他。

“我想，四公公！……救她，我能有什么法子呢？……”陈德隆完全像小孩子似的。

“我们就是为这个而来的啦！”关胡子说，抹去了胡子上挂着的一个汗珠。“没有办法我们还来找你吗？……我们商量好了，只怕你不回来！……现在，镇上新来的老爷听说很好，他手下有一个专门办这些事情的人！……总之，我们商量好了，你不回来我们也要办的！……我们邀了全村的老年人具一个保结，想把你的田作主押一点儿钱，用你这作丈夫的名字，去和老爷的手下人办交涉，就求他到街上去……总之，这事情是很可以办得成功的。旁的村中也有人

— I don't care about them as long as I can save her. I'll count these last six months as only a disgraceful dream."

The oldsters complimented him, then the two withered mulberry trees and the sturdy elm departed. Finally, Cucumber also left. Before he had gone a dozen paces, he halted. A pleasant thought came to his mind:

Wonderful. They'll put up a guarantee and get Meichun out. Mother's — Maybe...ho-ho...maybe I've still got a chance.

The weather was blazing hot. Meichun, who had been brought from the county jail to the town, was immersed in tears and misery all day. Her prematurely born infant, swaddled in a piece of cloth she had begged, wriggled in her bosom like a little pink mouse. Meichun nourished him with a maternal love she had never felt before and a trickle of milk from her breasts so meagre it was virtually non-existent. Huang's death had been more painful than cutting a piece of living flesh from her body. She wept until her oval eyes were dry and sunken as wells. From lack of proper food after giving birth, she had an anaemic sickly flush on her sallow face.

Her treatment was somewhat better in town than it had been in the county seat. The room in which she was locked had a bed and a table. But a dismal sense of tragedy and fear still clung to her trembling soul. Previously it was for Huang's sake, now it was entirely because of her baby that she perturbedly tried to maintain her health. She couldn't abandon the poor little thing — this flesh of her heart that had just come into the world. If an unhappy end really should prove inevitable, she intended to kill herself and the

办过来了！……”

陈德隆在心中重新地估计了很久很久，重新地又把自家和梅春姐的不可分离的关系深思了一会：一种阴郁，一种嫌忌的爱与酸性的悲哀！……在三个老头子和老黄瓜的不住的围攻之下，在自己的不能解除的矛盾之中，他终于凄然地叹道：

“一切都照你们三位老人家的好了，只要能救她的性命。钱，田，我都是不在乎的！……就算我半年来做了一场丢人的恶梦吧！……”

三个老头子都赞扬了他几句，走了——两枝枯萎了的桑树枝和一条坚强的榆树。随后，老黄瓜也走了。不过，老黄瓜他是只走了十几步远就停住的。他的脑筋里还正想念着一桩其他的心事呢：

“他妈的！真好！把梅春姐保出来时，也许……哼！他妈的，老子还有点儿希望呢！……”

四

天气更加炎热得炽腾起来。还保持了性命被由街上解到镇上来的梅春姐，整天地淹没在眼泪与沉重的怨苦之中。先天不足的弱小的婴儿，就像一只红皮小老鼠般的，在她的胸前蠕动着。她讨来了一块破布衫将他兜包了。用了一种从来不曾有过的，母亲的天性的爱抚，一种直有等于无的淡微的乳汁将他营养着。为了割肉般地疼痛着黄的死亡，而流枯了眼泪的，深陷着的扁桃眼珠子，就像一对荒凉的枯井般地微睁着。在她的金黄的脸上，泛起了一小块产后失

infant together. She would throttle him, strangle him, secretly. Meichun was very unwilling to let the puny little soul remain alone in the world and be mistreated by wicked men, even though she knew the destruction of her child was a serious crime, even though it seemed a painful and cruel thing to contemplate.

For three successive days she was plunged in these tragic thoughts. She thought perhaps her captors were intending to take her to her village and there... Bringing her food now were rough looking men. They checked up on her frequently. Early on the fourth morning, a middle-aged man in a long tunic suddenly appeared and led her out.

Tremblingly clutching her baby, for several moments she was seared by terror. Then, casting all thoughts from her mind, she firmly followed her guide into the central hall of the building.

A man with a moustache was waiting for her there. Two attendants were fanning him. Twisting his moustache and smiling, he said:

"Today, you needn't be afraid."

Meichun shivered. She stared at him, despair and anger in her eyes.

"People have come from your family with a guarantee. You can leave with them."

"Leave?" What was this all about? Meichun was dazed. Could she be dreaming? The smile left the man's face and in a loud admonitory voice he warned:

"Go, but from now you'd better be careful. Don't ever take a bad man for a lover again. If all the old men in your village hadn't

调的，贫血的，病态底红潮。

镇上似乎比较街上宽待了她些，把她押在一个有床铺也有方桌子的房间里。一种破灭的悲哀和恐怖，仍旧牢而有力地缚住了她的那战栗的灵魂。代替了黄而使她不能不惶惧与痛惜着自家的身躯的，完全是婴儿的生命。她不能抛掉这刚刚出世的苦命的小东西——她的心头肉——而不管；假如她的那不能避免的恶运真真来临了的时候，她是打算了和这婴儿一道去死亡的。叉死他！或者将他偷偷地勒毙！……她很不愿意这弱小的灵魂孤零零地留在世界上，去领受那些凶恶的人们的践踏。虽然她明知道这许是一桩深重的罪孽，一种伤心的，残酷的想头！……

一连三天，她都沉陷在这种破灭的悲哀的想头里，因为，他们那些人也许要将她拉到她自己的村子里去揍她的——她想。经常来监视她，送她的食物的，却完全换一些粗人男子。在第四天的一个清晨，突然跑进了一个中年的，穿长衫的人，将她从房子里叫出去。

梅春姐战栗地拥抱着她的婴儿，在经过一种过度的恐怖的烈火燃烧之后，她突然地，像万念俱消般地反而刚强起来，蹒跚地向中厅跟去！

一个留仁丹胡髭的人等在那里。旁边还侍立着两个跟随，替他扇风。他嘻笑地撚着他的胡髭说：

“今天，……你可不要怕……”

梅春姐战栗了一下！她用了一种由绝望的悲哀而燃烧出来的怒火，钉着那撮胡髭。

“你的家中来人来保你了！……现在，你就

put in a plea for you. . . ." Once again he smiled.

Meichun was completely confused. The middle-aged man in the long tunic escorted her to the compound gate.

"People from my family? Who can they be?"

Lantern Chen's bald head and bulging crab eyes suddenly appeared before her. He blocked her path.

"Aiya," she cried. This was worse than the fate she just escaped. It shook Meichun to the depths of her being. She nearly dropped the infant.

Without offering any explanation, two men helped her into a small sedan-chair. Dizzily she felt herself being carried along. For a long, long time she remained in a daze. Shame, fear, pain and misery made tears that were like blood gush from her eyes.

She had only the vaguest idea when they reached home. Hazily she could see that the house was filled with people. Her husband said something to Grandpa Four and a few other old men and escorted them all to the gate. It was only then that Meichun started to revive.

Her husband entered the door. How heavily his footsteps fell. In the centre of the room he halted.

He looked at her. Fearfully she looked back at him. Neither of them said a word. On his face — distress, bitterness, tragedy. On her face (now like a dry brown autumn leaf) — red patches of shame, and pained unhappy perspiration.

Thus for a long time they stood opposite each other in silence.

Finally, impelled by her love for her baby, tears of suffering rolling from her eyes, Meichun stepped towards her husband with

可以跟他们出去！……”

“出去？……”这又是一回怎样的事情呢？梅春姐像梦一般地朦胧起来。她仍然痴呆着！……突然地，那个人却又改变了他的笑容，作古正经地，大声地，教训她般地怒道：

“去罢——以后当心些！……别再偷坏的人做野老公了。这回要不是你们全村的老人都具结……”之后，他又是嘻嘻地笑将起来。

梅春姐完全变成糊里糊涂的了。她被那个中年的，穿长衫的人送到了头门。

“家中来人？……这又是谁呢？谁呢？……”

陈德隆的光头和一双螃蟹眼睛，突然地涌到门口来了！——他正正地拦在梅春姐的前头。

“啊哎！——”梅春姐突然地叫着！像比那恶运临头还要惊惧地，这突如其来的变化，完全震慑了她的残破的灵魂，她的手中的婴儿几乎要震掉下来了。

没有等她来得及明白这变化的原因的一刹那，就由两个人将她扶上一顶小轿，昏昏沉沉地抬着走了。好远好远她才回复她那仍然像梦一般的知觉。一阵羞惭，一阵战栗，一阵痛楚与悲酸，……将她的血一般的干枯的眼泪狂涌起来了。

是什么时候来到家里的呢？她完全模模糊糊了。她只是昏沉地看到了满屋子全是人。只听到丈夫同四公公和老年人们说了些什么话，又出去将他们通统送走了，她才比较地清醒了一些。

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the child in her arms. There was a tragic urgency in her voice, as if it were the child speaking from within her throat:

"Brother Chen... I was wrong...altogether. Go ahead and beat me. But please think of the child, please...."

Her hot tears fell on the sleeping infant's little hand, and from there dropped to the dusty floor. Head low, Chen approached her with a heavy tread. A sweaty male stench assailed her nostrils. Then he lay down on the bed and rested his lustreless bald head on the pillow. He was suffocating with repressed oxlike misery. Lantern was ready to burst.

"Well, let's hear it, madam official of the women's association." He sat up abruptly on the bed. "Done a fine job of disgracing me these past six months, haven't you? I've had to wander all over the place. I've been through hell. Now, by selling our land and pleading with officials, I've managed to get you back. But my name is ruined. Ruined."

Meichun patted the baby, who had awakened and was crying. Her head hung as if weighted by a thousand-catty boulder. Tears were no longer coming from her eyes drop by drop, they were gushing like streams.

Lantern sprang towards her like a wolf, as if struck by some sudden inspiration. He grabbed the crying baby from her arms, exclaiming hoarsely:

"Let me see, let me see. Is he a little bastard or isn't he?"

Grasping Lantern's hands, Meichun followed him around in a circle, screaming like a sick she-ape:

"Don't hurt him, Brother Chen. He's yours, yours...."

丈夫走进门来,脚步声音沉重地踏着!在房中,他停住了。

丈夫瞧她一眼——她也畏怯地瞧丈夫一眼!丈夫不作声——她不作声!在丈夫的脸上,显著一种憔悴的容颜——一种酸性的,悲哀的沉默!在她的脸上,还剩下(就像剩在一片枯黄了的,秋天的落叶上似的)一块可怜的残红——一种羞渐与悲痛的汗流的战栗!……

互相地站着,沉静了好久好久,好久好久。

终于,为了母性的爱——为了婴儿,梅春姐忍痛流泪地抱着那小人儿走近他的身边了。她说着——她的话,就好像是那婴儿钻在她的喉咙里说出来的一样,带着一种极其凄楚的悲声的呜咽:

"德隆哥!……现在,我的错,……通统,……请你打我吧!……请你看在孩子的面上——请你……"

她没有功夫揩她的眼泪,让它一滴赶一滴地流落在熟睡的婴儿的小手上,又由婴儿的小手落到尘埃。陈德隆低头重步地走近她的身边:一种男人的汗水臭和热臭透到她的肺腑。他走到床边躺下了。他那秃头阴暗无光的斜枕着。他那无可发泄的牛性的悲哀,把他闷的,胁迫的几乎发狂起来!

"你说吧!会长老爷!……"突然地,他又从床上翻身起来了。"大半年来你把我侮辱得成了什么样子了呢?……我的颜面?……我在外面千辛万苦地飘流!……回来,又求三拜四,卖田卖地的花钱把你弄出来!……我完全丧尽了我平日的声名了!……"

Chen couldn't make out who the baby resembled. He tossed him on the bed, rushed to the doorway and sat down abruptly on the threshold. It's difficult to tell with an infant just a month old whose blood he has in his veins.

Meichun snatched up the child and hugged him in a protective tight embrace. Chen's gloom and irritation intensified. He was plagued by jealous, oppressive, shameful, infuriating thoughts:

What am I going to do? Mother's — I'm out of luck. This thing has ruined the reputation of a lifetime. Mother's — mother's — mother's...

No matter how Meichun pleaded and beguiled, her husband remained distant, suspicious. At first, thanks to the observance of Grandpa Four and other old folks and the urgings of friendly neighbours, it seemed as if Chen might not make things too difficult for her. But as time went by he resumed his old savage merciless torments.

Meichun's life became once again a black abyss from which there was no escape. For the child's sake, for the only link with Huang that was left to her, she had to suffer and endure.

The worst times were at night, when Chen returned home drunk. He seemed to feel that only by chastising and torturing his unfaithful wife could he regain the face he had lost. He was deeply vexed and frequently very bitter.

When she got into bed with him, after driving off the mosquitoes and putting the baby to sleep, he would bite her cruelly and pinch her all over with his hairy claws. He would ask the most shameless

梅春姐摇拍着怀中苏醒而悲哭的婴儿，她的头千斤石头般地垂下着。她的眼泪已经不是一滴两滴地滴了，而是一大把一大把地涌出来。

突然地，像一个什么灵机触发陈德隆似的，他像一匹狼般地冲向梅春姐！他从她的怀中夺过那啼哭的婴儿来，沙声地叫着：

“老子看！老子看！他妈的！是不是小砍头鬼！是不是小砍头鬼？……”

梅春姐拖着他的手，跟着他转了一个旋圈，发着一种病猿般的嘶声的哀叫：

“德隆哥！……你修修好吧！他是你——的！……你——的啦！……”

陈德隆终于没有看清，就向床上一掷，自已跑到房门边坐下了。在刚刚弥月的婴儿的身上，是很难看出像谁的模样和血脉来的。

梅春姐将婴儿抱起来死死地维护着。陈德隆更加阴郁而焦烦了。在他那无方发泄的，酸性的，气闷的心怀里，只牢牢地盘桓着一种难堪而不能按捺的愤愤的想头：

“我怎么办呢？……他妈的！我倒了霉了！……我半世的颜面完全丧在这一回事情里了！……他妈的！妈的，妈的，妈的！——”

五

无论梅春姐怎样地哀求，巴结，丈夫对于她总是生疏的，嫌忌的。最初，他在四公公和许多老人的监视和邻居的解劝之下，似乎还并不见怎样地给梅春姐以难堪。但后来，过的久长一点了，便又开始他那原是很凶残的无情的磨折。

dirty questions about her relations with Huang. Doing her best to protect the sleeping infant, Meichun would sobbingly beg him to desist. Then Lantern Chen's bull-like rage would be aroused, and he would knead and twist her body like a rag. Soaked in tears and sweat, she would contract into a trembling ball.

"Will you tell me or not?"

"Tell you what?" Meichun would cry tragically, gasping for breath.

"How did you get started with that starry-eyed devil?"

"I don't know."

"I'll kill you."

"Kill me then. You'll be doing a good deed. The best thing would be to kill me and the child together."

One night, after torturing her cruelly, Chen felt a little better. To tease her, he held the baby upside down and said he was going to throw the little bastard — he couldn't really believe the child was his — into the lake. Only after Meichun wept and virtually kowtowed did he let her take the infant back.

It was very late by the time Lantern Chen slept. Meichun often couldn't close her eyes all night. The sound of her husband's snores infuriated her. If it hadn't been for the baby she might have taken other action. But now, in the misery of the dark night, she could only think back painfully on her idyll with Huang and the new life she had led for half a year. She recalled vivid, sad pictures that now seemed only a dream. Lack of news about Wooden Image and the others made her particularly unhappy. Some, like the red-nosed old chairman and Mrs. Liu, were scattered and wan-

梅春姐的生活,就重行坠入了那不可拔的,乌黑的魔渊中。为了孩子,为了黄所遗留给她的这唯一的血脉,她是不能不忍痛地吃苦啊!……

当夜间,当丈夫仍旧同从前一样地醉酒回家的时候,梅春姐的灾难便又临头了。他好像觉得变节了的妻是应该给她以磨折,应该给她以教训,才能够挽回自己的颜面般的。他深深地懊恼着,并且还常常地为此而自苦!……

他用那毛蟹般的铁指,拧着梅春姐的全身——当她驱过了蚊虫,放好了婴儿陪他就寝的时候。他噬咬着她的奶头!他缚住她的腿!他追问她和黄间的一切无耻的,污秽的琐事!……梅春姐总是哀求地呜咽着,一面护着那睡熟的婴儿。陈德隆拧的牛性发了,便像搓烂棉花似的,将她的身子继续地大搓而特搓起来。梅春姐战栗地缩成一团,汗水与泪珠溶成一片!

"你告诉我不?……"

"告什么?……"梅春姐喘地,悲声地叫着。

"你怎么和那鬼眼睛的砍头鬼搭上的?……"

"我不知道!……"

"我杀死你!"

"杀死我吧!……修修好吧!……顶好是连我们母子一刀!"

陈德隆将她磨折得厉害的时候,心里就比较地舒服一些。接着,又有意捉弄她的,把她的婴儿倒提起来!他说:这是小砍头鬼——就因为他始终不能确信那婴儿真否是他的原故——他要将他抛掷到湖里去见龙王爷!……一直等

dering. Meichun seldom saw anyone she had known in the peasant or women's association. She didn't like to go out, and she was afraid to speak to people about these things. So she remained in her tomb of a home and suffered the ravages of her husband.

The black night seemed intent on destroying her. Menacingly it closed in, opening its huge maw. Mosquitoes, droning mournfully outside the netting, prevented her from getting up or easing some of the anger in her breast. She dared not gaze at those stars gleaming in the night sky; they would shatter her soul. She dared not look at the world around her — the temple, the grassy paths she and Huang had trod together, the groves, the island, the waves on the lake. For when she saw — it would be more accurate to say sensed — them, her heart nearly burst with agony.

Her husband's bulging crab eyes never left her for a minute. Even in the middle of the night when he was fast asleep, she seemed to feel their vicious frightening red glow.

She could only rain tears of blood upon her infant. She could only nestle close to the tender, weak, pitiful little face and whisper her misery, drawing in a bit of comfort with the baby's faint milky fragrance that was like nothing else on earth. In the past, in the less cruel dark past, she could count on Huang's help. For more than half a year they had been happy together. But now Huang was gone. As to Wooden Image and the others, she didn't even know whether they were alive or dead. And she couldn't abandon her child and go out to drift alone.

She was back in the same black pit she had been in a year before, a pit from which there was no escape. And her life was even

梅春姐哭着向他几乎叩头陪礼了,他才放下。

他睡着的时候,已经是夜深的很了。梅春姐常常通夜不能闭一闭眼睛。她听到丈夫的鼾声,她的怒火便狂烧着,只因了爱护这唯一的婴儿的生命,她才不能,或者是不敢做出旁的举动来的。她只能在这样黑夜的痛苦的哀怨之中,来回忆她和黄的伤心的爱史与大半年中的崭新的生活;来展开她的那幅梦一般的,着色的,凄凉的图画。尤其是关于木头壳他们的消息,老会长和柳大娘们的流亡……她很少能看到一个从前在过会中的熟识的人了,因为她不愿出门也不敢和人家交谈的原故。她就这样像埋在坟墓中般地埋在家里,忍痛地领受丈夫的践踏!

黑夜就像要毁灭她的全身般的,向她张开着巨大的魔口,重层地威胁着。蚊虫在帐子的四面包围着,唱着愁苦的哀歌,使她不能爬起来,或者是稍为舒一舒心中的怒愤。她不敢再凝望那夜的天空和那些欲粉碎她的灵魂的星光的闪烁。她不敢再看一看那大庙,那同黄践踏过的草丛的路途、园林、荒洲和湖中的悠悠的波浪!……她一看到那些——倒不如说感到那些——她的心就要爆裂般疼痛着。

丈夫的螃蟹眼睛,总是时刻不能放松地钉着她的。即算是到了夜深,到了他已经熟睡着的时候,都好像还能感到他那凶酷的红光的火焰,使她惊惧而不能安宁。

她只能将血一般的泪珠,流在婴儿的身上,她只能靠在那纤嫩的,瘦弱得可怜的小脸儿上,去低诉她的心的创痛;去吸取一点安慰,一点什么也不能弥补的,微弱的婴儿奶香。在过去,在

darker, more tragic, than it had been then.

"Heaven, I hope they're all alive and well. If only they... ai... ai...."

A considerable time passed.

Perhaps it was due to the exhortations of Grandpa Four and the old men, or maybe Chen just got tired of tormenting her, or maybe Meichun's hardships were about to take a new form. In any event Lantern's abuse of her gradually lessened. He drank frequently and resumed old habits that were hard to change — wenching and gambling and wandering around. He hadn't planted his land that season — over half was mortgaged anyhow — so there was nothing to interfere with his idling.

"Brother Chen, there's no hulled rice in the house. The baby —"

"Let him starve to death."

"Brother Chen, it's getting cold. The child has no clothes."

"Let him freeze to death."

"Brother Chen, do a good deed...."

Sometimes Meichun wanted to say more, but her husband would dash out into the fields without so much as turning his head. She would have no choice but to husk the rice herself, and rework some old tunic into baby garments.

Meichun was back in the same black pit she had been in a year before, a pit from which there was no escape. And her life was even darker, more tragic, than it had been then.

"Heaven, I hope they're all alive and well. If only they...."

那还比较地缓和一点的乌暗的生活之中，她还可能望得到黄的援救，终于还幸福地过了半年多光阴。然而现在呢？黄呢？……就连木头壳们都不知道生死存亡了！而自己又不能够忍心地抛掉这婴儿去漂去！……

一切的生活，都坠入了那一年前的，不可拔的乌黑的魔渊中。而且还比一年前更加要乌暗，更加要悲哀些了。

“天啦！……但愿他们都还健在呢！……但愿他们……唉！唉……”

过了好些时日。

是因为四公公他们老年人的责劝呢？还是因了丈夫陈德隆磨折得厌了而暂思休息呢？还是梅春姐的苦难转变了另一个方式的临头呢？……丈夫对她的打骂，便又慢慢地松弛起来。他除了经常喝酒以外，又开始他那本性难移的嫖赌和浮荡。田中横直这一季已经荒芜了，而且大半又都抵卖给了人家，他是很可以更加无挂碍地逍遥着。

“德隆哥！……家中没有米了呢！……”

“饿死他！”

“德隆哥！……天要凉了，孩子没有衣服呢！……”

“冻死他！”

“德隆哥！……你修修好吧！……”

常常地，当梅春姐想再要说几句的时候，丈夫已经连头都不回地跑到荒原中了。她无可奈何地只好自己来舂谷，自己来拿破布衫给孩子改衣裳！……

一切的生活，都重行坠入了那一年前的，不

Ⅵ

"I'm going to kill you, you little bastard. I'm going to kill you."

A big vegetable knife in his hand, Lantern Chen strode after his oldest son Xiang, aged six, like pursuing a chick. The two younger boys, aged three and four, tagged after their father, wailing in terror.

Chen nabbed Xiang in a corner.

"Ma, save me, save me."

"Yell, will you? I'll cut your throat."

Meichun flew out of the house like a wild goose. She wrapped herself around Chen's neck like a serpent.

"What are you doing, Brother Chen?"

"I'm going to kill the little bastard. Mother's — I'd sell him but nobody will take him. If I keep him he'll only harm me."

"Kill him, go ahead." Meichun squeezed Chen's neck with all her might. "Kill the two little ones first. Then him. Then me."

Lantern threw both the boy and the knife into the corner, then he shoved Meichun aside.

Neither his face nor his voice were the same as six years before. But his disposition hadn't changed.

Rubbing his neck he bellowed hoarsely: "Grab me, will you, you bitch. You lay with another man, and now you bring up this little bastard to harm me."

"Why don't you sell the two little ones first? Why don't you kill them first? You savage wolf. You can't earn enough to feed them."

可拔的，乌黑的魔渊中，而且还比一年前更要乌黑，更加要悲苦些了！

"天啦！……但愿他们都还健在呢！……但愿他们……"

第六章

一

"我要杀死你这小砍头鬼！我要杀死你这小砍头鬼！……"

父亲陈德隆拿着一把劈柴刀，大踏步地像赶一只鸡雏般地赶着他的六岁的大儿子香哥儿。两个四岁的，三岁的小的，也跟在他的后面唔呀唔呀地叫着！

他在一个门角弯里将香哥儿擒住了。

"妈呀！……救，救我呀！……"

"你叫！你叫——我割断你的喉咙！……"

梅春姐像一只野鹅般地从房中飞出去，蛇一般地绕着陈德隆的颈子。

"怎么，德隆哥？"

"我要杀死这小砍头鬼！他妈的！卖他卖不掉，留着来害老子！"

"杀吧！杀吧！……"梅春姐就在他的颈子上狠命地抓了一下！"顶好把那两个小的先杀了，然后再来杀他！再来杀我！……"

陈德隆将劈柴刀和香哥儿向门角弯里一摔，就开始和梅春姐大闹起来。

他的脸不是六年前的脸，声音也不是六年

Those words hurt Chen's bull-like stubborn pride deeply. He leaped forward and slapped Meichun across the face.

"Stinking whore. Who can't earn enough? Who?"

A red hand mark was printed on Meichun's left cheek. She nearly cried aloud. The children howled, and Lantern Chen struck at them madly.

Meichun grappled with him fiercely. They rolled upon the ground. Only when trembling with fury — he had never reacted this way before — Chen rushed to the threshold and sat down, did Meichun rise to her feet. At the sight of the wilful, helpless expression on his dried-up face, she felt a twinge of pity. But it was of very limited duration, and was immediately supplanted by a hatred born of years of torment.

Yes, her husband had changed greatly. Only his wilful, brutal, sullen nature was the same. Six years ago he got along very well, ploughing and planting his own land. Now he did odd jobs as a hired farmhand. Six years ago he led a free and easy existence with only a wife to support. Now he had three sons... no, two — Xiang's beautiful eyes confirmed Lantern's suspicion that the boy was illegitimate. Six years ago he was a notorious rake, gambler and drunkard. Today he couldn't even be sure of three square meals a day.

Meichun knew all this very well. And from what she had learned in her brief period of happiness six years before she could guess, though vaguely, what made her husband the way he was and what road he was travelling. But he wouldn't believe her. In his eyes she was a sinner, to say nothing of the fact that her words weren't

前的声音了;但他的性情却还和六年前一样。

他摸着他的颈皮,破嗓沙声地骂着:

"你抓呢!你这母猪狗!……我操你的祖宗!……你偷了人,你还养出这小砍头鬼来害我啦!……"

"你为什么不将小的两个先卖呢?不将小的两个先杀呢?……你这狠心的狼!……你没有本事养活——"

这种话深深地伤了陈德隆的那牛性的,倔强的心。他来不及等她说完,就跳起来给了她一个耳刮子!

"臭婊子!……谁没有本事?谁没有本事?……我操你祖宗三万代!"

梅春姐的左脸印了一个血红的手印,她险些儿哭起来了!孩子们也呜啦呜啦地叫着,陈德隆就像发疯般地来揍小孩子。

梅春姐死死地将他扭着,滚着!……一直到他气的发战起来——丈夫是从来不曾气得发战过的——冲到门限前坐下了,她才爬起着。她望着她丈夫的那种倔强的,而又毫无办法的干枯的脸色,也不觉地代他心酸了一回。但这心酸是很有限的,即时又被她的一种历年磨折出来的憎恨心排挤着。

是的,丈夫是变了很多了,单单除了他那倔强,凶猛的,牛性的内心以外。六年前,他还是很可以过活的,自耕自种的农人,而现在却是给人家帮零工的小雇佣了;六年前,他还是一个一夫一妻的逍遥汉,而现在却变成三个儿子——不,也许只有两个,因为从那个大的的一双眼睛上,他已经断定出来完全是小砍头鬼——的父

to his liking.

A hot southern wind swept in. It burned like fire. The man who had hired Chen, standing in the middle of his dry field, shouted for him to come and work the irrigation treadle. Angrily Chen rose to his feet and trudged out. His dark expression and his lustreless bulging eyes indicated that depression and tenacity were struggling within him for supremacy.

Meichun watched until he had walked far away. Filled with hatred, downcast, she sighed and went into the house. She put the two little ones she so disliked to bed. Then, taking a basket and leading the oldest boy by the hand, she set out to borrow some rice from Aunt Pockmark for supper. What else could she do?

Aunt Pockmark, like Meichun, was an unlucky woman. Her oldest son Wooden Image hadn't been home for six years. During the past three years, what with soldiers ravaging the countryside and the fields being stricken by flood and drought, she had been forced to sell her two youngest children — a boy and a girl. She was somewhat better off than Meichun in that her second, third and fourth sons were all big enough to work, and so she was able to scrape by.

"I can lend you three *sheng*. Your husband gets his meals on the job. It'll be enough for you and the kids for a couple of days. Anyhow...ah...."

Holding the hand of her little Xiang, Meichun sat for a while. A sincere worry she couldn't repress compelled her to ask about Wooden Image.

"Him? Oh, I heard he's in — now what was the name of that

亲了;六年前,他还是有名的嫖客,赌徒,和酗酒汉,而现在却变成了一个连一日三餐都得不到口的挨饿的人了。

梅春姐是很能够知道这些的。而且她还能从六年前的一段幸福的生活中,模糊地推想到了丈夫之其所以弄到这个样子的原因和他的目前的路道。但丈夫却不能听信这些,因为梅春姐已经在他的面前变成罪孽的人了,何况梅春姐所讲的还不能迎合他的心意呢。

一阵酷热的南风,燃烧般地扫过来。站在干旱的田野中的雇主家的人,已经又在叫他车水了。陈德隆气愤地站起身来,蹒跚地走着。在他的那黯淡的面容,和无光的螃蟹眼睛里,是很可以看出一种苦闷与倔强相混淆的矛盾来的。

梅春姐望着他走过好远好远了,她才憎恨而又悲哀地叹了一声,走进房中去。她将两个厌恶的小孩哄睡了,又将大的一个搀着,拿了米篮,无可奈何地走向村中的麻子婶家去借晚饭米。

麻子婶和梅春姐一样地都是不幸的人:她的大儿子木头壳已经六年不曾回家了,她的最小的两个儿女在前两三年过兵灾水旱时都卖了。……她稍为比较梅春姐好一点的就是她的二儿子,三儿子,四儿子都能得力了,所以她还能马虎地过着。

"我借给你三升米吧!……你的丈夫在人家去吃饭了,你们就可以吃两天,……唉!总之……"

梅春姐牵着香哥儿在那里坐了一刻功夫;

place? Anyhow, it's a long way off." Aunt Pockmark's voice tightened, and two tears rolled from her eyes.

Those tears stabbed into Meichun's heart like long sharp needles. Remembering Huang and their happy life six years before, she almost cried aloud.

"If it weren't for the fact that I can't abandon this poor little one, I'd be the same as your Wooden Image. I wouldn't care if I never came back. Now, as it is . . . ai . . . I'm just waiting for little Xiang to grow up. . . or. . . ."

Mystified, the child stared at his mother with eyes like stars. He tugged her hand.

"Ma, you're crying. Let's go home. Pa will hit me if he knows I've been out."

Meichun stroked the child's small forehead and peered mistily into his eyes. Suddenly, he exclaimed:

"Ma, my belly hurts."

Gathering him to her, Meichun picked up her basket of rice, said goodbye to Aunt Pockmark, and hurried home.

Born prematurely, never receiving proper nourishment, constantly harassed by Chen, Xiang was raised on his mother's tears. The boy had always been weak, and now this attack of dysentery enfeebled him dreadfully.

He was as thin as paper. His bloodless cheeks were sunken, accentuating the starry appearance of his eyes. Xiang was a heartbreaking sight.

Hobbling in from the gate, supporting himself with his hands a-

一种不能按耐的恳切的悬心,使她问到了木头壳。

“他吗?……唉,唉!听说是在一个什么……唉,记不清了!总而言之是蛮远的地方!……”麻子婶的声音酸楚起来,流出了两点眼泪。这眼泪,就好像是两枝锐利的针刺般的,深深地刺着了梅春姐的衷心。想起黄来,想起六年前的幸福的生活,她几乎又哭出声来了!

“我要不是……麻子婶,唉!不是抛不下这小冤家,……我情愿同你家的木头壳一样呢!我情愿永不回来!……我现在……唉!就只望那小冤家长大!……或者……”

香哥儿完全莫明其妙地怔着,瞪着他那小小的,吃惊的,星一般的眼睛,拖着他妈妈的手:

“你哭呢,妈妈!……回去吧,爹爹要打我啦……”

梅春姐抚摸着他的瘦小的头颅,朦胧地钉着他的小眼睛。忽然地,他叫着:

“妈妈,我肚子痛!”

梅春姐提起米篮来,将他抱在怀中,告辞了麻子婶,连忙向家里飞奔着!

二

先天不足,而后天又失调的,用母亲的眼泪养成起来的大儿子香哥儿,在丈夫的重层厌恶之下,本来早就非常孱弱的,何况还染上了流行的痢疾呢。

他瘦弱的就像一个小纸人儿了,他的两腮毫无血色地深陷着,格外地显露出他的那一双

long the compound wall, he crept to his mother's side and wept:

"Ma, Pa hit me again. He gave oil crisps to my little brothers but none to me. He told me to watch the water treadle. I don't want to watch the treadle. I want a crisp."

"Those crisps are too oily, precious, you've got dysentery." There was a sob in Meichun's voice. "Don't worry about him. You don't have to watch the treadle. Come on, Ma will teach you to write."

To distract the child, she wrote on a broken slate the pitifully few words she had learned from Huang six years ago. She dreamed of Xiang being able to read and write like his dead father before him. But the child was only interested in telling how delicious oil crisps were and in describing how fierce Chen looked.

"Watch how mama writes, Xiang. I'll buy you an oil crisp in a little while."

"No, I want one right now."

Meichun felt quite badly. She gazed spiritlessly at the compound gate. Sure enough, there was her husband coming back with the two irritating younger children. Both of them were munching oil crisps.

Was it his old jealousy which made him want to torment Xiang to death? Or was he venting on the boy his frustrated anger over his insoluble poverty? Dropping the hands of the two little ones, Lantern Chen strode up to mother and son.

"Come on, little bastard. We're going to watch the water treadle."

Xiang burrowed against his mother's bosom. "Aiya, Ma, save

星一般的小眼珠子,使人见了伤心。

他一拐一拐地从头门口撑壁移过来,爬到妈妈的身旁哭着:

"妈妈!爹爹他又打我哩!……他把'猪耳朵'① 弟弟吃,不把我吃!……他叫我去守车,……我要吃'猪耳朵'呢!……我不守车呢!……"

"好宝宝,好香哥!……'猪耳朵'吃不得呢,你痢痢啦!……"做妈妈的声音显然已经很酸哽了。"来,不要怕爹爹!不要去守车,……妈妈告诉你写字吧!……"

梅春姐忍心地哄着香哥儿。她把六年前从黄手里学来的几个可怜的字,在半块破旧的石板上画给他看。她幻想着这孩子还能读书,写字,……甚至于同他那死去的爹爹一样。但香哥儿怎么也不肯依她的,他只尽量地把"猪耳朵"的滋味说得那样好吃,又把爹爹的面相说得那样凶残。

"好呢,香哥儿……看妈妈的字吧……妈妈等等买'猪耳朵'你吃啦!……"

"不,我就要吃,妈妈!"

这要求是深深地为难了母亲的,她失神地朝头门打望着:真正地,丈夫携着那两个使她厌恶的小孩儿走来了,他们的小嘴里还啃着"猪耳朵"。

是旧有的酸心发酵要将香哥儿磨死呢?还是他自家的穷困不能解除而迁怒于香哥儿呢?

① "猪耳朵"是一种小孩吃的东西,用面粉做了由油炸出来的,形像猪的耳朵。——原注。

me."

Suddenly, the name "Huang" which Meichun had written twice in a wavering hand on the broken slate caught Chen's eye. It seared into his heart. He kicked the slate off the stool. It shattered to bits upon the ground.

"Fine. Mother's — So you're teaching him to harm me, just like that wretch," yelled Chen, charging forward.

He seized Xiang from Meichun before she could fight back and ran through the gate with him out into the blazingly hot fields.

Xiang screamed. Meichun shouted and pursued. The two little kids stood at the gate and bawled.

After dragging Xiang along for half a *li*, Chen threw him violently into a field of withered rice. Meichun rushed wildly to the child and wrapped him in her arms.

That night Xiang burned with fever. He was dizzy and couldn't get up. Meichun moved about the room frantically. She hastily put the two youngest to bed, then dashed out to speak to her husband and find a doctor.

Chen was taking advantage of the cool of the evening to raise water with the treadle for his boss. He was angry and wouldn't talk to her. To get a doctor meant going all the way to town. Years ago, Grandpa Four, Uncle Li and Whiskers Guan used to know a few elementary country medical methods. But the old men had all died during the drought year, and now there was no one in the village who could even write a simple prescription.

Anxiously, Meichun returned to the house. She stared in the lamplight at Xiang's poor small head, at the slightly opened eyes

陈德隆撒了两个小孩的手，又大踏步地冲到梅春姐母子们的面前：

“去！小砍头鬼！……同老子守车去！……”

香哥儿死死地把脖子钻进妈妈的怀中。

“哎呀！——妈妈救我啦！……”

忽然地，那块破旧石板上写的两个歪歪斜斜的“黄”字，映到陈德隆的眼中了，那就同两把烈火燃烧了他的心般的，他猛的一脚将石板从小凳子上踢下来，跌成粉碎了！

“好啊！你妈的！还告诉他学那砍头鬼来害我呢！……”他叫着，他张手向她母子扑来！

梅春姐正待要和他争闹时，他已经从她的怀中夺过香哥儿了。他冲出头门，向火热的荒原中飞跑着！

香哥儿叫！……梅春姐叫！……两个小的孩子也在头门口哇哇地哭起来了！

陈德隆将他抓着提过了半里路，就将他猛的一摔——跌落在干枯的稻田中，梅春姐不顾性命地奔来将他抱着。

夜晚，香哥儿便浑身火热，昏昏沉沉地不能爬起来了。梅春姐急的满屋子乱窜！她连忙将小的两个放睡了，就跑出去寻丈夫和医生。

丈夫正趁着夜间的风凉在那里替雇主们车水，他愤愤地不和梅春姐答话。医生却要跑到镇上去才能请得来的。在早年，还有四公公、李六伯伯和关胡子们会一点儿不十分精明的乡下人的医道；然而，现在呢，这些老人们都已经在过荒年时先后死了，村子里就连会写两三味药方的人都找不出。

like dimming stars. With the greatest effort she controlled her tears.

After a long time, Xiang suddenly gave her a strained look.

"It hurts, Ma," he muttered. "Where are you? Ma, he hit me again."

"I'm here, precious, mama's here. I won't let him touch you."

"He hits me. He never hits my brothers. Ma, why does Pa hit only me?"

Meichun couldn't restrain her tears much longer. Pain, anger and misery tore her heart. An anguished cry escaped her.

"Darling Xiang, my flesh. He's not your real pa."

Xiang's eyes slowly dulled. Beads of cold perspiration appeared on his brow. Suddenly, he again burned with fever.

"Where is he...my real pa?"

Meichun leaned close. "You have no pa, precious," she whispered hoarsely. "Your pa...."

Before she could finish, Xiang trembled and closed his eyes. He was still talking, but his voice was no louder than the drone of a mosquito.

"Ma... I want... I... want...my ...pa...."

She pressed her cheek against his brow. It kept changing from hot to cold. "Darling," she exclaimed. "What is it? Xiang...."

Her shout awakened the two little ones, and they began to cry. Meichun hastily shifted them to another bed with a straw pallet and let them howl.

Xiang's body gradually changed from hot to warm, from warm to cool, from cool to cold. His starry eyes, which had been shut

梅春姐心慌意乱地走回来，在小油灯下望着那可怜的小脑袋，望着那微睁而少光的星星般的小眼睛。她尽量地忍住自己的酸泪，而不让它流出来。

好久好久了，香哥儿忽然吃力地钉着他的妈妈，低声地哼叫着：

“我痛哩！……妈妈，你在哪里啦？……爹爹又打我呢！……”

“妈妈在这里！……宝宝，妈妈在这里呢！爹爹不打你呢！……”

“他打我啦！……他不打弟弟！……妈妈，他为什么单单打我呢？……”

妈妈的眼泪已经很难再忍了。一阵刺心的疼痛、悲愤与辛酸，使她不能自制地失声地说出她的哀情了。

“宝宝，香哥！我的肉啊！……他不是你的爹爹呢！……”

香哥儿的眼睛渐渐地痴呆了起来，额角间冒着两滴冰凉的汗珠子。一忽儿，他的全身又火热着。

“我，我的……爹爹呢？……”

妈妈哑着嗓音靠到他的身边。

“宝宝是没有爹爹的！……宝宝的爹爹——”

香哥儿的身子突然震动一下，他没有来得及等妈妈说出他爹爹的去处来，就又合上他的眼睛了。他仍然哼着，但那声音却几乎同蚊子一般地逐渐低微起来。

“妈呀！……我……要……呢，……我……的……爹……爹……啦！——”

tight, opened a trifle. They would remain a trifle opened forever. They would never close again.

Meichun felt as if she were falling from an enormously high cliff. Innumerable burning hot needles seemed to be piercing her heart. Then she went numb. She didn't weep. She had no sense of pain. She simply stood dully for a long, long time. The two youngest children cried uproariously.

Lantern Chen returned from working the water treadle. While he was still a good distance away he shouted through the darkness:

"Are you dead? Mother's — You're letting those kids cry themselves sick."

Meichun said nothing. She didn't move. She remained standing as if paralysed. She couldn't hear anything. She couldn't see anything either — until her husband rushed up directly before her.

Chen blanched. He had seen the figure on the bed illuminated by the small lamp. He was shaken by a stab of conscience, a sense of guilt, a feeling of remorse. But again his hard wilfulness took over. He deliberately gave a hard laugh.

"If he's dead then he's dead. Little dog. It would be better if we all died. Mother's — Get it over with, once and for all."

Meichun suddenly awakened from her tragic daze. When she became aware that her heart was plucked and gone, when she saw clearly the situation before her and the completely unaffected expression on her husband's face, she fell prone on the bed like a stiffened corpse, threw her arms around the icy little body and rolled in grief.

"Heaven. My heart. My flesh. My poor little baby. Even in

妈妈的头，伏到了他那一冷一热的额角上，她大声地，吃惊地呼叫着。

“宝宝！……怎么啦？……香哥！……”

两个小的却惊醒了，哇哇地叫着，梅春姐急忙将他们送到另一张空置的稻草床上，让他们自家高声地号哭着。

香哥儿的身子终于慢慢地由热而温，由温而冷，而变成了冰凉。他的一双星一般的小眼珠子由牢牢地闭着而又微睁着；但他却是永远地微睁着，而不再闭将下来了。

像从一个万丈深长的山涧上掉下来，像有无数枝烧红了的钢针在她的心中穿钻着，梅春姐骤然失掉她的意识和灵魂了。她不知道哭，也不知道悲伤地，呆立在那儿好久好久。那两个小的的哭声几乎震翻了半边天地。

丈夫车水回来了。他老远地在黑暗中大呼着：

“你死了吗？你妈的！……你让小孩子们哭死呢！……”

她不做声，也不移动，仍然痴呆了般地站着。她什么都听不见，什么都看不见，一直到丈夫冲到她的面前时。

陈德隆的脸色突然惊悸起来！因为他望见了那小灯斜照着的床铺上的情形。一阵良心的谴责——一阵罪孽的自觉的不安和悔恨，使他惶悚起来。然而，他却仍然倔强而冷酷，仍然故意地狠心地冷笑了一声：

“死就死吧！狗东西！……顶好通统死掉了，他妈的大家干净！”

梅春姐忽然由那过度的悲痛的昏沉中苏醒

death you can't peacefully close your eyes. . . ."

Illusions, hopes, plans, six years of bitter struggle to raise her son — in an instant, all were destroyed and converted into an earthen grave mound by the side of the lake.

Meichun wept for three whole days. She didn't cook, she didn't wash clothes, she paid no heed to her neighbours' words of comfort, she ignored her husband's savageness and her children's tears. By the fourth day she had cried her eyes dry. Her voice was hoarse.

Gradually her grief became deep silence. And in this deep silence she recalled the path she had been following six years before, a vague path yet very clear. For a long time she pondered quietly.

That night, when her husband went out to work his employer's water treadle, by a determined effort Meichun came to a decision. She made up a small bundle of clothing, put the two children to bed — she disliked them because of her hatred of her husband — then stole out of the door.

She left with neither regret nor sadness. She had no destination in mind.

The night, the plain, were the same as they had been six years, seven years, before. Only now there were fewer young people and old folks in the village. Only now Meichun's feelings were different.

"Where shall I go?" She halted by the lakeside. Raising her head slightly, she gazed up at the sky.

了来。当她感到了自己的一页心肝已经被人摘去了的时候，当她看清了眼前的事物和丈夫的那仍然像毫无感触的面容的时候，她便像一个僵硬了的死人般地倒向床铺去，双手抱着那冰凉了的小尸身打滚！

"天啦！……我的心肝啦！……我的肉啦！……我的苦命的儿啦！……你死都不闭眼睛啦！……"

三

一切的幻想，希望，计划，与六年来扶养孩儿长大的重沉的苦心，只在一刹那间全都摧毁了——变成了一堆湖滨的坟上的泥土。

梅春姐整整地哭了三日，不烧饭，不洗衣，不听邻人们的劝慰，也不管丈夫的凶残和孩子们的哭闹。到了第四天，她的眼泪也就非常地干枯了，她的声音也就非常地嘶哑了！

她渐渐地由悲哀而沉默，由沉默而又想起了她的那六年前的模糊而似乎又是非常清晰的路途来！她慢慢地静思了好久好久！……

夜间，她等丈夫又去和人家车水的时候，用了一种很大的决心的努力，打好了一个小小的衣包；偷偷地让两个由憎恨丈夫而连及到他们的身上来的小孩睡过之后，便轻轻地走出了家门。

她没有留恋，没有悲哀，而且还没有目的地走着。

夜，仍是六年前的，七年前的夜；荒原，仍旧是六年前的，七年前的荒原！……只不过是村

The Big Dipper trailed its long handle. Eyelashes had sprouted on its two brightest stars. They were part of a pink full smiling face. Below this, two smaller stars had also grown eyelashes. Another face, little but also smiling. It seemed to be saying:

"Go, Ma, don't worry. I've already found my pa. Go on, towards the east. There'll be sunlight there tomorrow."

Tears streamed painfully from Meichun's dried-out eyes. She stood and looked for a long time. Then, at last, she departed.

The song of the bachelor Cucumber, who would never find a girl to love him, again drifted across the plain to Meichun's ears. But it no longer had the lilt of six or seven years before. It had become a hungry lonely lament.

A tender miss of seventeen,
Such a pretty sweety,
Knelt there before me,
And kowtowed in entreaty....

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

中少了些年轻人和老年人的生活；只不过是梅春姐变换了一回六年前，七年前的心情。

“我往哪里去呢？……”在湖滨，她突然地停住了一下。她把头微微地仰向上方。

北斗星拖着一条长长的尾巴，那两颗最大最大的上面长着一些睫毛。一个微红的，丰润的，带笑的面容，在那上方浮动！……在它的下面，还闪耀着两颗小的，也长着一些睫毛的星光，一个小的带笑的面容浮动……并且还似乎在说：

“妈妈！你去罢！你放心吧！……我已经找到我的爹爹啦！……走吧！你向那东方走吧！……那里明天就有太阳啦！……”

梅春姐痛心地流着两行干枯的眼泪！她是在那里站了，望了好久好久，才又走开的。

在旷野，那老黄瓜——那永远也讨不到女人的欢心的独身汉的歌声，又飘扬起来钻进梅春姐的耳中了。但那完全丧失了他六年前，七年前的音调，听来就好像已经变成了一种饥饿与孤独的交织的哀号。

十七八岁的娇姐呀～～～没人睬啦～～～

跪到情哥面前～～～磕响头！……

…………

…………

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